

SPEECH BY MR HRI KUMAR NAIR AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING FOR THE 'RAINBOW IN THE DARK' ART EXHIBITION ON 15 JANUARY 2015

Ms Chua Swee Keow, Vice-President, Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good evening.

2. As a young boy, I grew up in Toa Payoh. During one of my school breaks, I decided to go down to the SAVH premises in Toa Payoh Rise to offer my time as a volunteer. I was given a briefing by a gentleman, after which I asked him whether the volunteers were normal people. He looked at me sternly and said that the visually impaired were not abnormal. I never made that mistake again.

3. Indeed, over the years, I have come to learn that the visually impaired are extra-ordinary people. The works exhibited at this 'Rainbow In The Dark' art exhibition is evidence of that fact.

4. Since its establishment 63 years ago, SAVH has been actively serving to meet the needs of over 3,400 visually impaired clients by providing a range of comprehensive vision rehabilitation and after-care programmes, Skill Development Programmes and Accessibility Programmes to empower and enable them.

5. One of the skill development programs is Touch Art – an art and craft program designed for the visually impaired to produce art works. It means more than creating job opportunities. It offers opportunities to socialize with others, build courage, confidence and hope. Art therapy differs from traditional therapy. Art therapy can help improve various physical issues such as reducing pain, anxiety, and tension. It also helps in developing social skills. It benefits both children and adults.

6. Today, SAVH continues its good work. With the support and funding from National Art Council and Central Singapore CDC, SAVH has organized an art therapy programme for its visually impaired clients. Held from September to December 2014, 24 participants went through an artistic process with therapists who introduced different sensory-based methods of creating art without sight. Tonight, the inaugural 'Rainbow In The Dark' art exhibition is the result of the Programme. In total, there are 110 artworks produced but only 30 have been displayed due to the space constraints.

7. Services provided by SAVH play an important complementary role to our national welfare and social system for our visually impaired community. As Singapore's population ages, these services will be in greater demand and will help Singaporeans, especially our older citizens, to maintain a healthy and meaningful life.

8. It is heartening to see VWOs like SAVH continue to promote this spirit of assistance and help in the community. I am no longer a young man with long school holidays, but as an MP, I think I can be useful in other ways. I therefore look forward to my constituency working closely with the SAVH to assist those who need help in the community, and create a brighter future for Singaporeans, young and old.

9. Let me end by congratulating SAVH on the opening of the 'Rainbow In The Dark' art exhibition. At most art exhibitions, attendees are warned: "Please do not touch the works". I understand the opposite applies at this exhibition and I very much look forward to touching and connecting with the artworks.

10. I wish the SAVH many more productive years ahead as it continues its good work in serving the visually impaired community and Singapore in the past 63 years.

11. Thank you very much and a very happy Jubilee year for Singapore.