

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR JOHNNY TAN, NUSS PRESIDENT  
AT WOMEN'S CHOICES, WOMEN'S LIVES: SHAPING THE NEXT 25 YEARS  
5 MARCH 2011, 9.00 AM AT NUSS KENT RIDGE GUILD HOUSE**

Professor Aline Wong, Singapore's representative to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women

Ms Nicole Tan, President of AWARE

Members of AWARE and NUSS

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to all, and welcome to AWARE's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference which NUSS has the honour of jointly hosting.

**History of AWARE**

This forum is of special significance to both AWARE and NUSS.

It was back in November 1984 that NUSS organised a similar conference with the same title, 'Women's Choices, Women's Lives'. That conference was organised by NUSS members Zaibun Siraj and Vivienne Wee in response to the fierce debate that arose with the introduction of government policies that were deemed unfair to women.

The forum was attended by more than a hundred women and men who were interested in issues facing modern women in Singapore. Lively debates and hard questions were asked during that conference.

AWARE was formed from that 1984 conference as some of the women who attended the conference felt that there was a need for an organisation to improve women's social and legal status. AWARE was formally set up a year later and for four years, AWARE members had their meetings in their own kitchens, waiting rooms and offices before the first AWARE Centre was established at Race Course Road.

In spite of such humble beginnings, AWARE has contributed to many significant social changes through their work in improving gender equality in Singapore. Among these include

- the development of guidelines to curb sex discrimination in advertisements;
- improvements in police handling of rape cases;
- driving revisions to the Women's Charter to provide better protection to victims of domestic violence and
- revisions to the Penal Code which include issues on marital rape, just to name a few.

AWARE has published more than 20 books and research reports on gender issues which have helped to heighten the public's awareness on these issues.

### **NUSS and AWARE**

NUSS has a long-standing interest in the status of women in Singapore.

In addition to the landmark conference in 1984, NUSS produced a special issue of our academic journal, *Commentary*, in 1981 with a focus on Women in Singapore. The Society also hosted a reception on March 1985 to celebrate International Women's Day, an event that had not been celebrated in Singapore for some eleven years prior to that.

The Society's Constitution was amended between January and March 1985 to be gender friendly and continues to be so today. And in January 1986, our then Study Group Sub-Committee organised a forum on women's rights entitled 'Towards an Equal Society'. To keep current on the status of women in Singapore, a second *Commentary* focusing solely on women's issues was published a year later while other past issues of *Commentary* included articles concerning women's rights and their status in Singapore.

### **Congratulations to AWARE**

NUSS is therefore extremely pleased and honoured to be part of AWARE's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference. Thank you for inviting us to be involved in assessing the changes and improvements to the status of women in Singapore in the last 25 years through this conference.

Today, I am sure we will get to hear from the distinguished speakers and the audience some very serious and thought provoking questions leading to another meaningful 25 years in the promotion of equal opportunities for all in Singapore.

On behalf of NUSS, I would to extend my heartiest congratulations to AWARE on your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and wish you all a successful conference.

Thank you!