

READY TO FIGHT FOR WHAT'S OURS

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FROM inanimate objects, including family albums and favourite toys, to heritage encapsulated in the dialects spoken by their grandparents, there are many things that young Singaporeans do not want others to ever take away from them - apart from their loved ones and friends.

Even if it costs them their lives, as many of them declared on postcards (called ZoCards) - which posed the question: What will you defend? - to mark this year's Total Defence Day yesterday.

For Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean, who was speaking at a commemorative event, the diverse responses, collated from some of the 120,000 ZoCards distributed islandwide as well as online and radio call-in contests, reflect the tapestry of Singaporeans' dreams and hopes.

He said: "A favourite toy is not just an object, it represents what Daddy gave me, an expression of love and bonding ... At the core of these hopes and dreams are the shared values that make them possible; and ideals we live by such as meritocracy, justice and equality, regardless of race, language or religion.

"These do not change, and they inextricably link the defence of what is mine to that of yours and others."

When Total Defence Day was first enacted in 1984, its aim was to "rally the entire nation should we have to go to war", the Minister recalled. While that objective remains, today's dangers could come in "unexpected shapes and forms". The ongoing economic crisis, Mr Teo noted, is the latest testament to how "in today's interconnected world, events far away can have profound effects on lives here in Singapore".

Reiterating his confidence that Singapore will ride through the latest storm, Mr Teo was particularly pleased that the Total Defence activities this year gave many Singaporeans a platform "to share, to listen to what others have to say and voice out what they have to say" on the topic.

Apart from the ZoCards, other activities included animation and short film competitions, as well as a musical to mark the 25th anniversary of Total Defence.

Returning to the theme, the Minister also shared what he would defend. "I have visited many countries and lived in several for a period of time. Nothing beats the feeling of getting on that plane and heading home. There is no other place that I would ever call home.

"I will defend Singapore ... a home where my family, our families, and future generations can live in peace and realise their aspirations together."