

**OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
MR LAWRENCE WONG, AT THE WORLD CITIES SUMMIT MAYORS FORUM,
10 JULY 2016, SINGAPORE**

Let me wish all of you a very warm welcome to the World Cities Summit Mayors Forum. To all our guests from abroad, I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to you as well.

2 This is the 7th edition of the Mayors Forum. Some of you are here for the first time, many others are regular participants at this forum. I hope that shows the value of the forum because you are our repeat guests, and that means something to us. I presume you are here again, having found the forum valuable in the past, and you are coming back, so we welcome you too. And certainly for all of you who are here, we hope you will come back again.

3 Today, we have with us over 110 mayors and city leaders along with senior leaders of international organisations and urban solutions companies.

4 As part of the forum today, we hope to discuss common challenges that cities face, to think about new innovative solutions that will help to tackle some of these challenges. And in particular, we would like to hear from all of you, because we would like to hear your experiences and we hope that this can be a forum where we can learn from one another and mutually benefit from each other's experience.

5 Urbanisation is an issue that all of us care about very deeply, and it is also an extremely urgent issue, because worldwide, the trend of urbanisation is continuing unabated, and in fact, continuing to pick up momentum. So managing urban areas becomes one of those important challenges of our time. While it is an important challenge, it also presents a tremendous opportunity because cities are economically dynamic, they are culturally diverse, they offer good living environment for residents of the city, and they can also be environmentally friendly. A compact, well-designed city can be low in carbon emissions, environmentally-friendly, and be part of the solutions for us to tackle climate change in the future.

6 While each of our cities may have its unique context and challenges, I think all of us face very similar issues. All of us also share very similar broad objectives. We want to champion vibrant economies in our cities, create good jobs for our people, provide a safe and liveable environment for residents and we would like to deliver good public service - utilities, transport, or other infrastructure solutions.

7 For Singapore, these issues on sustainability and liveability have always been important considerations for us because we are a city-state; we are small – 700 sq km. Issues on liveability and sustainability have always been important considerations since the start of Singapore's history. I will share in my opening

remarks, three considerations or thoughts that have been in our minds, in our course of urban planning, from our own experiences.

8 First is the need for long-term planning. City planning is really long-term work, and the results do not happen overnight. It takes good planning, systematic implementation over the years, many terms of government and many decades. It is not easy to do long-term planning but that's a challenge that all of us face because city work requires long term vision and implementation. An example is how Singapore became a Garden City. It was started as a direction from the government in the early years of independence. Our founding Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew felt that becoming a garden city was a strategic imperative. Mr Lee said it was a priority because it was about creating a sense of equalness in society so that regardless of one's background, whether you live in a landed property, condominium or apartment, no one will be excluded from public spaces, and everyone can enjoy a sense of well-being, from green spaces in Singapore. And that's how from 50 years ago, we systematically started looking at making Singapore a Garden City. We protected our natural areas, created major reserves, built parks and gardens in our housing estates. Today, we enjoy the fruits of systematic implementation over many years and decades.

9 Second is the need for constant innovation and R&D. A lot of this is driven by the necessity to overcome our constraints - we have limited land and no natural resources. Necessity has motivated us to innovate, and to turn our vulnerabilities into strength. That's why today, for water, we expanded our water catchments, build reservoirs, develop new water technologies which allow us to re-use water so that every drop can be circulated more than once. From the point of vulnerability, water has now become an area where we have developed technologies, and we are becoming more self-sufficient.

10 Land is another area where we have innovated. For a small island state, 700 sq km in size, we always need more land and over many years, we have innovated and come up with new solutions. Where we are sited here now is reclaimed land – it used to be just water, but today, we have a new city located here. We are continuing to reclaim land. For example, next to Marina Bay is a container shipping port. This shipping port would be moved over the coming years, to the western part of Singapore which is being reclaimed. When that move is made, it would free up space next to Marina Bay to expand our city centre. And the expansion of the city centre, the new space that is being freed up, will amount to three times the size of the present Marina Bay. So it frees up space, and opens up many more opportunities for Singapore to develop, despite our small size.

11 We are going underground as well. All the chilling that we experience here today is done through an underground district cooling system, sited underground, so that it saves space and is convenient and energy efficient. These are solutions that we are constantly trying to innovate and find leeway of doing things.

12 There are many other interesting possibilities for the future. We can look at new energy solutions like storage, carbon capture, hydrogen, and there are also future green transport, green mobility solutions that we are looking at and exploring, including the use of electric vehicles and autonomous vehicles. These are areas which we are interested in, which we will be pushing for and we are investing significant amounts of R&D funds in order to find new breakthroughs for the future.

13 So I think innovation and R&D is an important topic, and hopefully today's discussions will also provide new insights on potential innovative solutions that can help in addressing some of the urban challenges we face together.

14 Finally, the third point I would like to make, is about our own experience in making constant engagements with different stakeholders and taking decisive actions. And that's a conversation topic that we would have about governance and governance tools.

15 In Singapore's case, a lot of these arose through a certain national attitude that developed from the circumstances of our founding. Because as a new nation 50 years ago, we had every disadvantage you could think of as a nation. We did not expect to survive, and that history provided us a certain national mindset that the world owes us nothing, that we have to fend for ourselves, and it also created a very strong contact between our pioneer generation of political leaders and our Singaporean population that there were challenges that we had to face together as a nation, there were trade-offs that had to be made, and sacrifices that sometimes had to be made in the short term in order to ensure survival.

16 And that process was, I think, critical in allowing us to address the problems we faced together and to come up with solutions in tackling these challenges. It allowed us to move quickly into land acquisition to resettle people who were living in villages into new high-rise public housing flats. And so that whole redevelopment process was made possible through this very strong compact. In some instances, it required difficult policies. If you look at our public housing flats today which houses more than 80% of our population, in every block of high-rise apartment, every single neighbourhood, we require an ethnic balance. That means everywhere you go in Singapore, in every housing estate, there are quotas for every single ethnic group. It's a very intrusive social policy, very difficult to implement, but we have done it for many years and decades, and in a way, it has brought about tremendous benefits for us as a society. Today, every neighbourhood in Singapore is mixed, people from different races grow up together. If you visit a public housing flat, and walk through the common corridors, you will easily meet a Malay, Chinese, Indian family - people from all religions living side by side together. They are comfortable with one another, their children go to the same school together and the feeling of shared identity is much stronger as a result.

17 So it's one of those things that through tough measures brought about by circumstances, and the governance process enabled this, and it has brought about tremendous benefits for us. A lot of what we do is a result of our history; it's a result of how we started as a nation that was not meant to be and how we progressively evolved our social and political cultures. And that created a bias towards decision making that emphasise hard work and solutions. But our society continues to evolve. We just celebrated our golden jubilee last year – that was our 50th anniversary of independence, and we're now embarking on our next phase of development, our next 50 years. We are at a different starting point, our population is growing, we are much better-educated, expectations are higher, our society is more diverse and we are more interest-balanced. But the same goal of wanting to make tomorrow's Singapore better than what it is today remains. And I'm sure that is the case for all of you as well, wanting to make our cities much better tomorrow than what it is today. So we are happy to share our experience and we believe that we have much to learn from all of you, from all the cities that are gathered here, and we are happy to make our very modest contribution to the international discourse on cities by hosting a platform like this.

18 I think it is also important that what we do here is linked to the broader global conversation on urban challenges. And so all of us know that Habitat III will be held in October this year in Quito in Ecuador, where global leaders will come together to discuss and to set the path for a new urban agenda, to guide and to support sustainable urban development. This year's Mayors Forum – at the end of the forum we'll have a declaration that will be linking the discussion today with the Habitat III process. So whatever we are discussing here will not be done in isolation from the broader global conversation that is happening on urbanisation and we hope that through our discussion today, we can give some useful suggestions and contributions to the new urban agenda that will eventually be adopted at Habitat III.

19 So ladies and gentlemen, we have a very exciting day ahead of us, one which I believe will yield much enriching and valuable discussions on innovative urban solutions and governance processes. On that note, I wish all of you a very fruitful discussion. Thank you very much.

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