

OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, DESMOND LEE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2014 WORLD CITIES SUMMIT YOUNG LEADERS SYMPOSIUM, 31 MAY 2014, 9.20 AM, SANDS EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTER

“Seeding Change in My City”

Ambassador Burhan Gafoor

International Selection Committee members

World Cities Summit Young Leaders

Distinguished guests

Ladies & gentlemen

Introduction

1 Thank you Ambassador Burhan for the introduction. Let me once again warmly welcome all of you to the inaugural World Cities Summit Young Leaders Symposium. It is indeed an honour to be part of this exciting new initiative under the World Cities Summit – one that brings together a group of very distinguished young urban leaders committed to catalysing change and driving innovation to make cities better places to live in.

Cities Today

2 In today's age of digital connectivity, global flows of people, trade and information are accelerating the pace of urbanisation at unprecedented rates. In the process, economies and societies are being radically transformed, and cities are at the heart of such transformations. How a city deals with the challenges and opportunities that the wave of urbanisation brings can potentially make or break a city.

3 While the challenges of urban population growth, rapid urban development and social inequality may seem daunting, these are actually common challenges faced by many cities around the world. In the same vein, so are the solutions. Cities are therefore powerful incubators for common solutions to address the ills and challenges of urbanisation. For cities that have been able to manage the process of urbanisation well, you have much to share so that other cities can benefit from your experiences.

4 Take Singapore for example. From the early days of our development, our founding leaders actively sought to learn from the successes of other cities. Ideas were adapted and practical new solutions were formulated to suit our unique context as a city-state. As a result, we have managed to transform quite significantly in the short span of 50 years since our independence. From a fledgling undeveloped nation plagued by political instability and urban slums, we have indeed moved a long way to be the city that we are today. It has nevertheless been a continuous journey of learning and doing for us. Even today, as the urban challenges that we face become increasingly more complex, we have to continuously look for innovative solutions to address them.

WCS Young Leaders – Change Catalysts

5 It is therefore apt that the theme for today's symposium is about seeding change in cities. The seeds of change need to be planted today in order for cities to reap the benefits of sustainability and liveability tomorrow. This is the charge of young urban leaders like you. The actions and decisions that we take today will determine the future of our cities.

6 I am encouraged and impressed by the rich diversity of young leaders present at today's symposium. 57 World Cities Summit Young Leaders from different parts of the world and diverse urban sectors have gathered here along with other distinguished guests. Many of you are prominent leaders in government, international organisations, corporations, non-governmental organisations and academia. This diversity is also a reflection of how city governments or policy makers cannot on their own create liveable and sustainable cities. It requires the active and constructive contribution of the public, private and people sectors.

7 Many of you are already driving or are involved in various initiatives and projects that are catalysing change in your cities. We have city mayors who are mobilising their communities to find practical and innovative ways to improve their city woes, such as flooding and waste management. Some cities in Indonesia, for instance, are tackling flooding by mobilising the community to implement simple and practical measures such as creating absorption or drainage holes to help alleviate flooding.

8 Some of you from industry are also working on various SMART city technologies. These range from integrated technology systems that can

improve urban planning and development designs, to micro services that can vastly improve the lives of city dwellers through service provision. Others are driving design and building innovations that can improve the liveability and sustainability of cities, while those from the people and NGO sectors are working on initiatives that are aimed at strengthening communities and social resilience of cities.

9 In Singapore, our young leaders from various sectors are also involved in tackling the complex urban challenges that we face in this city. Our planners and industry players are looking for innovative solutions to optimise land use and create space for our various needs. These range from integrated mixed use vertical developments, to green building and greening innovations. We also have young leaders from the people sector who are championing initiatives and causes that are aimed at building a strong and inclusive society.

10 This is important - let me talk about building sustainable and liveable cities. It really goes beyond physical infrastructure or development. Let me talk about city planning. We often think only of building the infrastructure and spaces for communities, but actually it is the passion and energy of our people, and the vibrancy, and the civic-mindedness of the communities that make cities come alive, and they are really the soul of our cities.

Conclusion

11 The wealth of experience and knowledge that the World Cities Summit Young Leaders bring with you is tremendous. I hope that you will all capitalise on this symposium and harness the ideas that will come up from the discussions later. Seize the opportunity to make new friendships and networks. Exchange ideas, collaborate and learn from one another. Most importantly, take action to seed the changes that will make a difference to all our cities and all the lives of our city dwellers.

12 The conversations that start today should not end. It will continue and I'm happy to note that it will continue at the next Young Leaders Symposium, which will be held in New York City next year, together with the World Cities Summit Mayors Forum. To conclude, I am very glad to launch the inaugural Young Leaders Symposium today. I look forward to the rich and fruitful discussions that will place in the course of today. Thank you and have a wonderful exchange of ideas.

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