

Opening Address by Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, at the Partners for the Environment Forum, on 19 September 2022

Partnership for a Green, Liveable and Climate-Resilient Singapore

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning. Welcome to the Partners for the Environment Forum.
2. This annual event has a special significance this year, because we are celebrating MSE's 50th anniversary. The Forum also marks the start of Climate Action Week - a week when environmental champions in Singapore rally the nation to take collective climate action to secure a sustainable future for Singapore. It is great to see that more than 80 partners from corporates, community groups and schools have stepped forward to organise 140 activities during the week. And we look forward to seeing large turnout in our events after two years of "online events" during the pandemic. Indeed, there is much to celebrate and be thankful for.

SINGAPORE'S PLACE IN AN INCREASINGLY TROUBLED WORLD

3. Recent events have dramatically changed the global landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic brought the global economy to a halt. More than six million people around the world lost their lives, and many others lost their livelihoods. Governments embarked on unprecedented fiscal spending to support economies and save jobs and livelihoods. As economies reopened, pent up consumer demand, coupled with the disruption of supply chains worldwide from the pandemic, heated up the economy and generated inflation.
4. We are also reeling from the effects of the war in Ukraine. Disruptions to global food and energy supplies have caused inflation and hunger in many parts of the world. Some countries have reacted by imposing export bans or restrictions on food items. The war, which is a man-made catastrophe, has masked a deeper, greater threat to mankind - climate change and extreme weather events that will have a more permanent, deeper impact on water supply and food production.
5. Geopolitical tensions and rising contestation for influence and resources are also disrupting global trade. Policies to promote onshoring and protect technology are causing capital to flow to countries with large markets, away from competitive production bases.
6. Amidst these trends, how does Singapore continue to thrive as a global trading and finance hub? The pandemic has demonstrated our ability to stay nimble, adapt

quickly, and maintain a strong sense of social solidarity. Throughout the pandemic, we looked after one another and stayed resilient through supply disruptions.

7. But our way forward is not self-evident, and success is not a given. We must decide what our place will be in an increasingly troubled world. To do this, we need to have a conversation about who we are as a people, and the role each of us will play in our collective effort to address these challenges.

FORWARD SINGAPORE – AN EXERCISE TO REFRESH OUR SOCIAL COMPACT

8. Over the past 50 years, MSE's mandate has grown, from environmental public health and public hygiene to include areas such as water resources, coastal and flood protection, food safety and food security. This reflects Singapore's progress, and also our changing priorities amidst new and evolving challenges. We must always strive to be one step ahead, so that we can advance on our own terms, and not be forced to play catch up, or bow to the whims of external forces.

9. The Forward Singapore exercise will allow us to consider and discuss what we want for Singapore's future, what the priorities on our national agenda should be, what the trade-offs are, and what we are willing to do to achieve them. How do we sustain and strengthen our national resilience, ahead of future crises? How do we better care and provide for our ageing population? How do we enable our people to access good jobs throughout their working lives? How do we build a more liveable and endearing home?

10. DPM Wong set out our key principles and approach at the launch of the Forward Singapore exercise earlier in June. The discussions will be organised along six pillars: Equip, Empower, Care, Build, Steward, and Unite. Through these discussions, we will sharpen our sense of nationhood, and strengthen our sense of shared responsibility to Singapore, and to one another.

THE STEWARD PILLAR UNDER FORWARD SINGAPORE

11. Today, I would like to discuss our social compact within the context of the Steward pillar. I will touch on our social compact in three aspects:

- a. First, between current and future generations. How should we address the inter-generational equity of climate change;
- b. Second, among ourselves as a people. How should we pursue competing economic, social, and environmental goals; and
- c. Third, the roles and responsibilities of the Government, businesses, and people, and how each of us can contribute to Singapore's future.

Social compact across generations

12. First, the social compact across generations. We have inherited Singapore in a good state due to the foresight and prudence of past generations. Now, with the baton squarely in our hands, **we need to ask ourselves what our generation should do to minimise the cost of climate change to future generations.**

13. Climate change poses a serious threat to our survival. Rising urban heat threatens our health and well-being. Prolonged drought or intense floods can affect energy sources and food production, and impact Singapore's access to these essential supplies. The rising sea threatens to engulf large swathes of our island nation. The green transition is no longer an option, but a strategic shift we need to make to survive and thrive in a carbon and resource constrained future.

14. We need to take a two-pronged approach to tackle climate change – climate adaptation to survive, and climate mitigation to thrive. To adapt to a changing climate, some of our biggest investments will be in coastal protection, such as seawalls and natural barriers such as mangroves. To fight climate change, we need to curb our emissions. One of the most effective ways is by putting a price on carbon to reflect its environmental costs. And we are doing so gradually but decisively to give companies predictability. We have announced that Singapore's carbon tax will be raised from the current S\$5 per tonne to S\$25 per tonne in 2024 and 2025, and S\$45 in 2026 and 2027, with a view to reaching S\$50-80 per tonne by 2030.

15. These are significant long-term investments and economic shifts that will span years, even decades. And the results of these efforts may take even longer to come to fruition. Therefore, we need to talk about the trade-offs that will arise across generations. How much do we pay for these measures now? How quickly should we implement them? The sacrifices we make today will not bring us immediate benefits, but they will enable us to bequeath a liveable planet to future generations of Singaporeans.

16. Our long-term plans and commitments can also generate indirect dividends for us. They create stability and certainty for global businesses and talents looking to anchor themselves here. They provide assurance that Singapore's plans align with their own goals to combat climate change and strengthen their own resilience. As talent, capital, and technology come together in Singapore, we will create more value. And Singapore and Singaporeans will benefit from our continued growth and development.

Social compact among Singaporeans

17. Second, the social compact among Singaporeans. Our nation's progress hinges on achieving the holy grail of economic progress, social inclusion, and environmental protection. However, this is a delicate balancing act that comes with difficult trade-offs. With limited resources, **we need to ask ourselves how we can continue to grow the economic pie sustainably, while distributing it in a way that ensures no one is left behind.**

18. For a start, we may see temporary cost increases for carbon-intensive goods and services as environmental externalities are accounted for. I mentioned the carbon tax earlier. We will use the carbon tax revenue to support companies as they invest in greener and more sustainable production methods, and cushion the impact on households.

19. Strengthening our food supply resilience will require us to be flexible with our food choices and invest in diversifying our food supply. Because we are heavily reliant on food imports, disruptions to global food supply chains can hit us quickly and abruptly, resulting in shortages or sharp price spikes. To spread our risks, we need to go beyond sources that are nearest and cheapest, and buy from a diversity of sources. The industry must also ensure they have robust Business Continuity Plans.

20. Beyond diversifying our imports, we are growing our local food basket. The 30-by-30 goal is our aspiration to build Singapore's capability and capability to produce 30 per cent of our nutritional needs by 2030, up from less than 10 per cent today. How do we do it without clearing more land for farming? How can we do it when we are constrained on all fronts – water, land, labour and market size?

21. While the green transition will come with trade-offs, it also holds great promise for our economic development. There will be new opportunities and good jobs in the emerging green economy, as we develop in areas such as green finance and carbon services. Likewise, the greening of our existing industries – such as electrification of our transport system, more resource and carbon efficient manufacturing, and the growth of renewable and green energy – will also transform existing jobs and generate new economic opportunities.

22. We must make sure that we do not leave any Singaporeans behind during this transition. We will support workers to reskill and upskill to remain employable and competitive. Will the impact of the green transition be uneven and throw up winners and losers? How fast we can move towards net zero and how we do it? We should have a national conversation with careful consideration from all stakeholders on the potential impact and benefits.

Roles and responsibilities of the Government, businesses, community and people

23. Third, the respective roles and responsibilities of the Government, businesses, community and individuals. We all have a stake in Singapore, and a duty to protect our environment. **As we look forward to a new phase of nation building, we need to ask ourselves what more each of us can and must do as stewards of our environment.**

24. **The Government will lead the change.** Under the GreenGov.SG initiative, the public sector is setting ambitious targets. We aim to peak our emissions around 2025, five years ahead of our national target. This will require us to use less energy, water and resources. In the MSE Family, we are setting the air-conditioning temperature in our buildings at 25 degrees Celsius. Where we hold events outside our buildings, like today's event, we are requesting for the same to be done where possible.

25. GreenGov.SG is one part of the Singapore Green Plan, a whole-of-nation roadmap for Singapore's sustainable development, which sets out plans and targets for the rest of this decade. Such a far-reaching transformation would require not just strong Government policies but also corporate stewardship, community leadership and a change in our individual habits.

26. **The industry must drive the sustainability agenda in their respective sectors, and find like-minded partners to multiply their impact.** Companies are taking steps to lower their resource footprint and move towards circular and zero waste business models. Producers of regulated electrical and electronic products are taking responsibility for the collection and proper treatment of the products they place on the market when they reach end-of-life, through the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for e-waste. Extended Producer Responsibility will also apply to beverage producers soon, under the upcoming Beverage Container Return Scheme. Many companies, particularly those in the fast-moving consumer goods industry, are working to reduce their packaging, incorporate more recycled content in packaging material, and make their packaging more recyclable. Companies on Jurong Island are working with one another to harness waste heat, reduce carbon emissions and recycle waste better.

27. More are looking at sustainability beyond their core business activities and influencing their suppliers and customers, such as mitigating the carbon emissions of their buildings. DBS has launched DBS Newton Green, Singapore's first net zero building by a bank. Many others are working to lower the carbon footprint of their buildings by incorporating sustainable design and technologies.

28. **Communities also play an important role in environmental stewardship, by bringing attention to local environmental issues, and mobilising people and**

resources to address them. We have a vibrant civil society contributing to the protection of our environment. For example, environmental groups such as the Ocean Purpose Project, Green Nudge, and Waterways Watch Society have been organising clean-ups at our beaches and waterways to keep our public spaces safe and free of marine litter.

29. We are seeing the momentum grow from the ground up. Since its inception in November 2020, the SG Eco Fund has awarded over S\$6.6 million to 105 community projects across the people, private and public sectors. The Green Action for Communities movement is bringing together community leaders and residents to seed and nurture good ideas that bring sustainability to our homes and neighbourhoods. I am happy to see so many stepping up to create positive change in the community.

30. The Government, industry, and community have important roles. **But ultimately, it is us individuals, who will drive the change.** As consumers, we can exercise our purchasing power to encourage businesses to produce greener goods and services. As residents, we can be gracious and considerate to our neighbours by keeping our communal spaces clean and healthy. As community members and leaders, we can act for change by starting ground up projects and rallying others to pitch in for the environment. As stewards, we can lead sustainable lifestyles, and encourage our family and friends to adopt environmentally friendly habits, like reducing waste.

31. **Our individual choices and actions matter because they determine the collective outcome.** As part of the Forward Singapore exercise, we will be starting a series of conversations on environmental and fiscal sustainability. To kick this off, we invite members of the public to share with us their views on environmental sustainability issues, and come forward with a pledge – to be a contributor, an advocate, or a champion for environmental sustainability – via the Forward SG website. I look forward to hearing your views and suggestions. I look forward even more to your participation, to co-lead and co-create.

PARTNERSHIP FOR A BETTER SINGAPORE, FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

32. As stewards, we recognise that we are investing in a Singapore that will endure beyond our generation, and our children's generation — that we are caretakers and guardians of a country that will and must outlast us.

33. At MSE's 50th anniversary this year, I want to honour the stewards that came before us. It is the vision and drive of our pioneers that led to milestones such as the clean-up of the Singapore River, the creation of NEWater, and the building of our beautiful offshore landfill, Semakau. These iconic symbols are testament to Singapore's sustainable development over the decades, and are the result of the hard work and sacrifices of those who served in the Ministry in its earlier days.

34. Just like how those before us transformed Singapore into a green and modern metropolis today, we too must ready ourselves to embark on a new transformation. The success of Singapore's green transition will hinge on the collective will, wits, and efforts of the Government, businesses, the community, and people.

35. Together, let us strive to be good stewards of our home, and leave behind a greener, more liveable and more climate-resilient Singapore for future generations.

36. Thank you.