

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TAN CHORH CHUAN,
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
AT THE “SINGAPORE AT 50: WHAT LIES AHEAD?”
CONFERENCE OPENING DINNER
2 JULY 2015, 7.00PM, ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

A very warm welcome to the Singapore at 50+ Conference. This event is organised by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the Institute of Policy Studies. It is the centrepiece of NUS' celebration of SG50, and our university's 110th anniversary.

We are truly honoured to have such a distinguished group of speakers, panelists and delegates at this conference – thank you very much for your participation and support. We are also very grateful to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for gracing this event with his presence, and for giving us the opportunity to learn from his insights and perspectives about the future.

Though we are only just past the half-way mark, 2015 is already proving to be an eventful year. There have been widespread celebrations, with many events recalling our past and re-affirming the things, big and small, that define us as Singaporeans.

In March, we marked the end of a remarkable epoch with the passing of our nation's founding father, Mr Lee Kuan Yew – it was a time of profound sadness and loss but also one of unprecedented and deep national bonding. Very importantly, this has been a year of reflection on how far we have come as a nation and a people.

The Singapore story is a truly remarkable one. It was driven by passion and conviction, and underpinned by an unwavering commitment to integrity, meritocracy and racial harmony. Crucially, it was marked by an amazing ability to adapt and change, to anticipate and to respond to significant shifts in the external and local environment.

This capacity for continual re-invention would be even more vital as we look to the future.

It will be a future of rapid, volatile change.

Globalisation has brought transformative benefits but also many negative consequences. Profound geo-political shifts have contributed to global growth but also created new tensions and fault-lines. Technology has revolutionised our world, but threatens to displace jobs, at least in the short term. Near

instantaneous communications have changed the way we live but carry the potential of social polarisation. As all these factors interact and converge, they create many exciting opportunities, but also deep complexity and unpredictability.

These and other topics provide a broad and rich canvas for the SG 50+ Conference. The Conference is a timely platform to explore the policies and approaches of the past half-century, and to look ahead at the major drivers of change which will shape our nation over the next 50 years.

For the past several months, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the Institute of Policy Studies have worked tirelessly to bring together a diverse and distinguished range of voices and perspectives. The goal is not just to stimulate interesting discussion, but also to generate ideas and potential solutions that may help contribute to Singapore's thinking about being future-ready.

As this is our 110th anniversary, I would like to also talk about NUS, which, with the strong support of the government, has made great progress to become a leading global university. And over the past 50 years, we too have undergone 3 major reinventions.

First, our education has been transformed – we moved from a rigid curriculum with early narrow specialisation, to one which is flexible, broad-based and global. For example, more than 70% of NUS undergraduates today have at least one study abroad experience and we have more than 70 joint and double-degree programmes with renowned universities around the world.

Second, NUS was corporatised by the Ministry of Education in 2006. This profound change has given us the autonomy to choose and pursue our institutional positioning and strategic goals, and has been a crucial driver for the rapid progress we have made.

Third, NUS made the shift from a teaching institution to a research university where students learn from faculty at the leading edge of research in their fields. Today, our research strengths are broad-based and we are among the world's leaders in several areas ranging from material sciences to quantum technology; from engineering and computing to Asia-related studies; and from biomedical sciences to operations research.

But throughout the course of these 3 big shifts, our university has continued to strengthen our focus on being relevant, and creating value.

To illustrate, NUS' education stresses experiential learning – the immersion of students in real world situations and meaningful community engagement. Our Residential Colleges and Halls of Residence for example, have many well-structured longitudinal programmes where students work with less-advantaged groups in society, and reflect and learn in the process.

With regard to research, we have re-doubled our efforts to realise the economic and societal value from our work, to collaborate with industry, and to help drive the growth of Singapore's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In relation to this conference, for example, NUS has many research centres and programmes carrying out research relevant to the issues being discussed. Our expertise covers topics ranging from the political economy of Asia to water policy; from ageing to shifts in family structures; from life-cycle financing to the interactions between science, technology and society; among others.

We cannot anticipate all that will unfold over the next 50 years. Some developments, such as demographics and urbanisation, can be monitored, and the responses proposed, and prepared; others will arrive with swift and unexpected force.

To continue to succeed, Singapore must remain, as always, alert, and nimble, carefully picking out the pathways that will allow us to reach new and sustained heights of progress and achievement.

Good, multidisciplinary research can play a key role in this process, and NUS is fully committed to contribute to such types of research and their application.

The Singapore we see and enjoy today is the culmination of 50 years of unceasing endeavour. Through fierce determination, our pioneers turned an accidental state into a stable and prosperous nation. Their contributions and legacy are both profound and extraordinary. The task before us is to build on the robust foundations of Singapore's success, so that the next 50 years of the Singapore story will be just as productive, successful and uplifting.

It is our hope that this conference will generate fresh insights and ideas that would be helpful in this process.

With this, I want to thank you once again for your kind support and participation in this conference, and I wish you a very pleasant dinner and a very engaging conference to follow.

Thank you.