

National Statement by Minister for the Environment and Water Resources of the Republic of Singapore, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit

Excellencies,

President of the General Assembly,

Today, we celebrate 15 years of significant progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is built on a very good foundation

This new global development agenda sets out a commendable set of Goals. It reflects our most urgent collective aspirations. It also gives us the tools to “do development better”. No single model of development will be applicable to all. Countries will have to select from this menu to adapt solutions to their own national priorities and unique circumstances.

Singapore's sustainable development story

Small states, especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are vulnerable and feel the weight of global challenges most intensely. With small states forming more than half of the UN membership, we believe our views and concerns should be reflected in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Singapore is both a SIDS and a city-state. Since independence 50 years ago, we have pursued sustainable development. Despite, and perhaps because of, our natural constraints, we had to achieve economic progress whilst preserving a good living environment. Although we have one of the world's highest population densities, we have maintained our greenery and biodiversity, and we have enhanced our citizens' quality of life. This year, we were deeply honoured that our Singapore Botanic Gardens was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We believe that a dynamic economy, an inclusive society, and a sustainable environment are not zero-sum trade-offs. These are mutually-reinforcing and help create a virtuous cycle of development. We believe this approach is relevant to the 2030 Agenda.

Two factors are key for Singapore's development: first, pragmatism in our governance and implementation. Second, partnerships which have helped to build capacity and develop our human resources, as well as those of other developing countries that work with us.

Singapore's approach to policy-making and governance is pragmatic. We focus on outcomes, not ideology. Our policies are based on what works – even if they are sometimes initially unpopular or unfashionable.

Take the example of water. We only have 700 square kilometres on our tiny island and this severely constrains our ability to collect and store water. In order to diversify our water supply, we

expanded water catchments areas by cleaning and damming rivers where possible and improving reservoirs. We use membrane technology extensively to turn waste water into high-grade water, which we call NEWater, for both industrial use and indirect potable use. Recycled water is now accepted readily as an integral source of water.

We do not assume that any solution lasts forever. We constantly adapt to changing realities. Singapore recently set up a Smart Nation Programme Office. This works across the Whole-of-Government to use technology to enhance quality of life, create more economic opportunities for all and to strengthen community bonds in the midst of great diversity. One project, called Virtual Singapore, offers a 3D map of Singapore enriched with multiple layers of data about buildings, land and the environment. Citizens, industry, government and academia can partner together in order to monitor and tackle climate change and other environmental challenges. We even use Twitter as a platform. For example, 200 smart sensors in drains around Singapore automatically Tweet data when water levels and flood probability go up. These are perhaps the world's first tweeting drains!

Developing capacity

The second factor in Singapore's sustainable development journey is collaborative partnerships. Given our lack of natural resources, Singapore has focused on developing our human capital. We invest heavily in education to help our children develop their full potential, and to ensure that our workforce remains constantly updated with skills for the future.

As a fledgling nation, Singapore benefited from technical assistance and cooperation with the World Bank and UN agencies in the early years of our nationhood. In the 1970s and 80s, training programmes with companies like Tata of India, Philips of Holland and Sanwa Bank of Japan helped our workers improve their productivity and knowledge.

To pay it forward, we started the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) in 1992. Each year, we conduct 300 courses for 7,000 officials from fellow developing countries. This April, we welcomed our 100,000th SCP participant.

As a responsible global citizen, Singapore will continue to give back to the international community. I am pleased to announce the launch of a new Sustainable Development Programme under the SCP to support the 2030 Agenda. Through this Programme, Singapore will work with our friends to develop capacity at three levels.

First, at the senior leadership level, we will partner the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence to jointly offer leadership programmes on Good Governance and Public Sector Institutions.

Second, at the policy-design level, we will cooperate with UN-Habitat to roll out a multi-year programme on sustainable cities and urbanisation for 100 cities from the developing world.

Third, at the ground-implementation level, we will work with partners like UNICEF and UN-Water to provide training and consultancy focused on delivering practical and local solutions in water and sanitation for countries in need. DEEPENING PARTNERSHIPS

The unprecedented scale and ambition of the 2030 Agenda require renewed commitment and enhanced partnerships from all stakeholders – states, international organisations, international financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

Mr President,

Many issues of sustainable development cannot be addressed unilaterally. For example, transboundary haze from forest and peatland fires in Southeast Asia impairs the health of millions of people in the region, it compromises the safety of aircraft, and it damages our regional economy. The large quantities of carbon dioxide released sets back our global efforts to mitigate climate change.

This issue is directly linked to the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, and SDG 15 on sustainable management of forests, preventing land degradation and biodiversity losses.

Countries are individually tackling this problem of transboundary haze. But we need closer regional and international cooperation to apply legal and commercial pressure on errant companies to prevent them from profiting from unsustainable land and forest clearing.

To conclude, the late Dr Albert Winsemius, a UN advisor who helped to formulate Singapore's development policies in the early decades of our independence, once said that as a foreigner, he could advise but he could not steer the ship for Singaporeans. National pride of ownership and innate motivation are the biggest drivers of sustainable development. We applaud the 2030 Agenda for providing peoples and governments around the world with the necessary tools to take the ownership of their own futures.

Thank you Excellencies.