

Speech by Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Teo Chee Hean, at the National Climate Change Youth Conference on 14 June 2012

Distinguished Guests,

Teachers & Students,

I am happy to join you this morning at the opening of the National Climate Change Youth Conference. This event organised by the National Youth Achievement Award Council and the National Climate Change Secretariat brings together youth leaders and students to share experiences on climate change action, and forge and strengthen partnerships to address climate change.

Climate Change – A Global Challenge

Many countries are already experiencing more extreme weather events. In 2011, France, Spain and Switzerland had their warmest year since national records began. Several southern US states experienced their warmest summer since records began in 1895. North Korea had temperatures below freezing for 40 consecutive days, making it the longest cold spell since 1945. Sichuan saw its worst floods since records began in 1847. Korea had its wettest summer on record, with Seoul experiencing the heaviest single-day rainfall since 1907. On the other hand, crippling drought gripped much of the Horn of Africa for most of the year, and some locations had their driest 12-month period on record ¹

Singaporeans have also experienced changes in our own weather patterns, with annual average temperatures and rainfall rising over the last few decades. Our food supplies and business supply chains can also be disrupted due to extreme weather events in other countries, as was the case when Thailand experienced its worst floods since 1942.

Scientists and experts may differ on how fast the changes will occur, and the effects on different geographical regions, but there is consensus that all countries should take action now, to reduce the impact of climate change. What can Singapore do to address climate change? How do we position ourselves to seize the opportunities that arise from climate change? What can we do individually, and how can we work better with partners to make a difference?

National Climate Change Strategy 2012

Today, I am pleased to launch the National Climate Change Strategy 2012, or NCCS-2012 in short. This document outlines our strategies and initiatives to realize Singapore's vision to be a climate resilient global city that is well-positioned for green growth. Developed by the National Climate Change Secretariat in collaboration with other relevant public agencies, with inputs from the private sector and public consultations, the NCCS-2012 seeks to raise awareness about climate change and to encourage everyone to play a part through his or her daily actions.

Let me speak briefly about what Singapore is doing in three broad areas: First, Tackling Climate Change. Second, Gearing up for Green Growth. And third, Involving People and Building Partnerships

Tackling Climate Change

Let me start with how Singapore is addressing the challenges of climate change. As a small, land

constrained city-state, with limited access to alternative energy, it is not easy for us to reduce our carbon emissions. But we have already taken proactive steps to do so. About 80% of our electricity is generated from natural gas, the cleanest form of fossil fuel. Few countries have done as much as we have to manage vehicular growth and usage. The growth of the vehicle population is tied to available road space, and vehicle usage is priced to reduce congestion. Both measures help reduce carbon emissions from vehicles. A new Carbon Emissions-based Vehicle Scheme will come into effect from January 2013, to encourage car buyers to switch to vehicles with lower emissions.

We are investing in efforts to increase energy efficiency across all sectors. We have mandated environmental standards for new buildings, and there are more than 1,000 Green Mark building projects in Singapore today. We have been promoting recycling to reduce waste incineration. 59% of our waste was recycled last year, and we hope to raise the recycling rate to 70% by 2030. The Mandatory Energy Labelling Scheme helps consumers to compare the energy efficiency and life-cycle costs of household appliances. In 2011, about 80% of purchases of household air-conditioners and 85% of refrigerators were from the top two highest efficiency categories of 3- and 4-tick models.

While our emissions constitute only less than 0.2% of total global emissions, Singapore has pledged to do its part by curtailing its carbon emissions to 16% below our 2020 Business-as-Usual (or BAU) level of 77.2 million tonnes, if there is a legally binding global agreement. We have started to implement measures to reduce our emissions by 7 to 11% from the 2020 BAU level. We are now studying how we can stabilise emissions beyond 2020, while continuing to grow the economy. We will need to harness energy efficiency possibilities and leverage or develop innovative new low-carbon technology.

While this will not be easy, we can take a leaf from how we have overcome water constraints through R&D and innovation. By developing NEWater technology, we have reduced our dependence on imported water, and now export our capabilities in water management, desalination, and water reclamation technologies. We have already taken steps to enhance Singapore's resilience to climate change by implementing new flood alleviation schemes to cope with increases in rainfall intensity. In anticipation of rising sea levels, we have also raised the minimum level for new reclamation projects by an additional 1 metre, from the previous level of 1.25 metres. We are also building up research capabilities to better understand different aspects of the impact and vulnerabilities arising from climate change.

Gearing up for Green Growth

But there are also exciting opportunities in climate change too. Besides working to overcome challenges, there are also opportunities for Singapore. We can test new technologies, business models and solutions, so as to develop, improve and export climate-friendly products, solutions and services. Technologies and innovations developed in Singapore to address our own energy and climate challenges will also be useful to cities facing similar issues.

Indeed, with a pro-business environment, long-standing commitment to a clean and green environment, and strong emphasis on R&D, Singapore is well placed to be a green growth hub that develops and provides green solutions to the world. Already, Norway's Renewable Energy Corp has one of the world's largest, if not the largest, solar cell plants in Singapore. The world's largest biodiesel plant by Finnish company Neste Oil, with an annual capacity of 800,000 tonnes, is also in Singapore. By developing the clean tech industry in Singapore, we can also create high-value jobs, while propelling our economy on a green growth trajectory.

Involving People and Building Partnerships

Now, let me talk about the last area, on people and partnerships. Ultimately, how well Singapore

does in our response to climate change will depend on the collective efforts across the people, private and public sectors. Everyone has a part to play whether through lifestyle adjustments or changes to business processes. In our daily lives, we can all make choices that help to reduce carbon emissions. This could be through buying more energy efficient appliances, taking public transport, using less air-conditioning, or simply switching off the lights when we leave our homes, classrooms or offices.

Internationally, Singapore collaborates actively with international partners through various multilateral, regional and bilateral platforms. In particular, we support and participate actively in multilateral negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to develop a global agreement for climate change. I attended the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban² last December. Some of our youths from the NUS, NTU and environmental NGOs were there too. At Durban, all countries agreed to start negotiations on a new climate change framework beyond 2020. While this is a good outcome, much work remains to be done. Climate change is a global phenomenon, and all countries will need to play their part to address this challenge.

National Climate Change Competition 2012

I am encouraged by the active participation in this year's National Climate Change Competition, which comprises a Short Film Challenge and a Technology Project Challenge. The competition serves as a platform for students like yourselves to contribute ideas and play a part in addressing climate change through practical individual actions and technological innovations. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the Short Film Challenge today.

Our young people play an important part in climate change action. You can serve as agents of change to encourage greater environmental ownership. Many of you here today are already actively involved in climate change-related projects, through green clubs in your school or through various projects to raise awareness of climate change amongst your peers. You can be the ambassadors to take the message further, not just to your peers, but to your family members, neighbours, and in future your working colleagues.

A Flourishing and Enduring Home

Addressing climate change requires a whole-of-nation approach. What all of us do today will have a bearing on Singapore's living environment in the years to come.

The NCCS-2012 is an important document which demonstrates that Singapore is serious about tackling climate change. It outlines clearly what Singapore has already done, what we are doing now and what we intend to do in the future. But it should not be a static document. It should evolve as our understanding of climate change improves. I hope that the document will spark even greater interest and further discussion among all stakeholders about our aspirations and responsibilities, about our hopes for the future, and how we can individually and collectively address climate change effectively and efficiently.

I hope all of us will continue to work together to ensure that Singapore remains a flourishing and enduring city which current and future generations of Singaporeans are proud to call home.

Thank you and I wish everyone a fulfilling and enjoyable Conference.

Footnotes:

¹ World Meteorological Organization, "WMO statement on the status of the global climate in 2011", March 2012 (http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/wcp/wcdmp/documents/1085_en.pdf)

² The UN Climate Change Conference in Durban was a series of meetings of the 17th Conference of the Parties to the

UNFCCC, and the 7th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP-17/CMP-7).