

**Speech by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
President, National University of Singapore
Official Opening of 54-56 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock
26 September 2009, 11.00 am**

Your Excellency Tun Datuk Seri Utama Mohd Khalil bin Yaakob
Tuan Yang Terutama Yang di-Pertua Negeri Melaka

Thank you very much for joining us today on this special and happy occasion – the official opening of Townhouses Numbers 54 and 56 at Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

On behalf of the National University of Singapore (NUS), let me express our deepest appreciation to Your Excellency for gracing this official opening as our Guest-of-Honour. Your Excellency, may I humbly seek your consent to address the gathering.

The Right Honourable Datuk Seri Haji Mohd Ali bin Mohd Rustam
Chief Minister, Malacca

The Honourable Datuk Seet Har Cheow
State Chairman of Tourism, Cultural and Heritage Committee

Our Special Guest, Ms Agnes Tan

Professor Datuk Ghauth Jasmon
Vice Chancellor, University of Malaya

Heads of Department

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Students

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. Thank you very much for joining us today for the official opening of Townhouses Number 54 and 56 at Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock. My special thanks to our distinguished guests and friends from Malacca and other parts of Malaysia, and from Singapore for joining us today.

As NUS pursues its aspiration to be a leading global university centred in Asia, we have been greatly helped by the strong encouragement and support from our benefactors. Today, I would like to express our deep gratitude to Ms Agnes Tan, the daughter of Tun Tan Cheng Lock, a truly remarkable individual and highly respected community leader, whose name this street bears. Embodying the spirit of giving, Ms Agnes Tan has made a very generous gift to NUS that has enabled these two townhouses to be transformed into a rich resource for the study of Asian architectural and urban heritage. Ms Agnes Tan's gift will also enable the NUS Department of Architecture to offer up to four Tun Tan Cheng Lock Scholarships in Architecture every year to support research and education in this field. The scholarships are open to students from NUS and universities in Southeast Asia.

Ms Agnes Tan – we are deeply appreciative of your generosity and for your belief and continuing support of NUS' aspirations and endeavours. Thank you very much!

I would also like to thank Mr Peter Lee for so kindly facilitating the gifts for his great support.

As part of the restoration, the NUS team also carried out research on the history and background of townhouses No 54 and 56. And I found one of the findings quite fascinating. We learnt that the first doctor to operate out of the house number 54 was Dr Ong Bak Hin, an alumnus from the Class of 1913 of then King Edward VII Medical College in Singapore, which is a predecessor institution of NUS. So we are really delighted that the premises once used by our senior alumnus will, from now on, contribute to his alma mater's study of rich historical architecture and urban

environments in Asia. In this regard, these two townhouses will complement the Baba House at Neil Road in Singapore, another project made possible by the generous gift from Ms Agnes Tan to NUS. Together, they will play an important role in promoting and preserving a unique piece of Asian history and architecture.

Already the restoration of the two townhouses has given a new momentum and raised awareness of Asian architectural and urban heritage. Shortly, we will have the pleasure of viewing the University of Malaya-NUS Joint Studio Programme Exhibition in the next room. The Exhibition showcases a multi-disciplinary study of shophouse precincts – it is the fruit of much work jointly undertaken by students from the University of Malaya and NUS that began in 2005. And, this joint project is yet another affirmation of the strong bonds and warm friendship shared by our two universities. I am very happy and grateful that Vice Chancellor Ghauth Jasmon has taken time from his busy schedule to join us today.

In closing, I would like to thank the State Government of Malacca and its officials for their support in the restoration of the townhouses. My appreciation also goes to Associate Professor Wong Yunn Chii, Head of the NUS Department of Architecture, and his team comprising Mr Cheah Kok Ming, Associate Professors Chan Yew Lih, Tse Swee Ling, Teh Kem Jin and Mr Philip Tay. I thank them for their hard work and dedication over the last two years in overseeing the careful restoration of the two townhouses. Yunn Chii, who traces his own roots to Malacca, also shared with me that the restoration would not have been possible without the encouragement of Mr Peter Lee, and the total dedication and active involvement of the Malacca conservation architect, engineer and building contractors – Mr Kamarudin Mohd Said, Mr Oii Kah Huat, Mr Haji Shaari Mat Sa'od and Mr Kee Eng Kwi. The beautiful state of the buildings we celebrate the opening of today, is clear testimony to their vision and hard work.

Let me end here by wishing you all an enjoyable and memorable day ahead.

Your Excellency, once again, I would like to thank Your Excellency for gracing this official opening with your presence for these two very special townhouses.