

Speech by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
President, National University of Singapore
National Sustainability Conference
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Ambassador-at-Large, Mr Chew Tai Soo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

1 Good morning. I am delighted to join you for the National Sustainability Conference. In particular, I would like to thank Ambassador Chew for agreeing to speak this morning despite his busy schedule.

2 Ambassador Chew has an extremely distinguished career in international diplomacy. He was previously Singapore's Ambassador to France, Spain and Portugal from 2004 to 2007, and Ambassador to Japan from 1998 to 2004. From 1991 to 1995, he was High Commissioner to Canada and Ambassador to Mexico. His previous major postings include being Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York from 1991 to 1995 and in Geneva from 1982 to 1986. Ambassador Chew also served as the Chairman of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) Committee on Trade and Development in 1984 and the Chairman of three GATT Dispute Settlement Panels in 1988. In the United Nations, he initiated the founding of the Forum of Small States in 1992 and was Chairman until 1995.

3 Currently, as Singapore's Chief Negotiator on Climate Change, Ambassador Chew leads an inter-ministry team representing Singapore in the United Nations climate change negotiations. He has kindly agreed to share with us today, his insights on the implications of a global climate deal on Singapore's strategic policy-making and governance. Ambassador Chew, we are indeed privileged to have you as a keynote speaker this morning and we are all looking forward to your lecture.

2009 as Year of Climate Change

4 2009 is a landmark year. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has declared 2009 as the year of climate change as we begin to pave the way towards a low-carbon future. Calls for a New Green Deal have been heard in the U.K. and Europe. U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged that his administration will address the issue of climate change squarely - invest in clean energy, improve energy and fuel efficiency, and create new green jobs for the US economy. There is rising optimism that an effective and equitable global climate regime will be concluded at Copenhagen at the end of the year.

5 It will not be easy to craft this regime. However, we have to do so because we are running out of time. There is firm scientific consensus that greenhouse gas emissions arising from human activities are a cause of climate change. New climate studies report that climate change is advancing at a greater pace and magnitude than expected. For example, a new study released by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), reported that climate change may be 'irreversible' for the next 1,000 years.

NUS Fights Climate Change

6 The impetus to act on the climate challenge is stronger and more urgent than before. As the 19th century philosopher Henry David Thoreau observed, "What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

7 Climate change is a global problem but we will require both global as well as concerted local action. NUS is committed to do its part. A study of our carbon footprint revealed that energy usage in buildings and facilities contributes largely to our total GHG emissions. We will work to improve our campus environmental

performance and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions arising from our activities.

8 NUS is a member of the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU), comprising 10 leading universities from Asia-Pacific, U.S., U.K., Europe and Australia. Within the IARU sustainability framework, NUS is committed to GHG reduction targets in three main areas of energy usage, air travel and campus fleet emissions.

9 To coordinate our efforts towards achieving these goals, we have set up the Office of Environmental Sustainability (OES). Reducing our GHG emissions will however require the concerted effort of the entire NUS community, particularly in the areas of facilities and operations. I urge our staff and students to work closely with OES and our student-lead initiatives towards reducing our carbon footprint.

10 I am glad to report that several of our administrative departments are already taking steps towards creating a more environmentally sustainable campus. For example, an inter-departmental taskforce, comprising members from Office of Safety, Health and Environment (OSHE), Office of Estate and Development (OED), Office of Student Affairs (OSA), OES, Students Against Violation of the Earth (SAVE) and Department of Architecture, have in the past few months been coordinating campus-wide efforts to improve our recycling infrastructure and cultivate proper, recycling habits. OED and OES are also collaborating in developing an energy master plan for NUS.

11 There is no doubt that in our drive towards environmental sustainability, we will face constraints and obstacles. But with collaborative effort and collective resolve, I am confident that these can be overcome. As ecologist Rachel Carson once said, "The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery – not over nature but of ourselves."

Conclusion

12 Today's programme has brought together some of Singapore's leading environmental researchers, spokespersons and policy-makers. They will be sharing with us their research findings, knowledge and insights. Discussions will range from climate change, energy security, environmental sustainability and sustainable development, to nature and biodiversity. Here is a timely opportunity to learn more, create greater awareness and to add to the discourse on Singapore's approach to environmental issues, management and governance. To contribute ideas as Singapore joins the rest of the world in meeting the global climate challenge.

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13 Thank you and I wish you a fruitful and insightful day ahead.