

**STATEMENT BY**

**MS GRACE FU**

**MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH**

**REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

**AT THE**

**38<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED**

**NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL**

**ORGANISATION (UNESCO)**

**4 NOVEMBER 2015**

Mr President of the General Conference

Chair of the Executive Board

Director-General

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Singapore congratulates UNESCO on 70 years of building peace through education, science and culture.
  
2. Singapore is a member of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee, and of various UNESCO networks. We proudly re-affirm this partnership, on this milestone anniversary for UNESCO.
  
3. 2015 is also a special year for Singapore, being our 50<sup>th</sup> year of independence. It was made even more special, with the inscription of the Singapore Botanic Gardens as a World Heritage Site.
  
4. Singapore is a young nation, but our roots go back centuries. The Gardens itself was founded in 1859. We carefully preserved it throughout Singapore's journey of modernisation and development. This did not happen by chance in our small and densely-populated city-state.
  
5. Other heritage sites have also stood the test of development. There are over 7,000 conserved buildings and 70 national monuments in Singapore. Like the Yueh Hai Ching temple – one of our oldest temples, built in the 1850's, where our ancestors gave thanks after arduous journeys at sea. Or the former Supreme Court and City Hall, from pre-independence days, which we have lovingly restored to house our new National Gallery.
  
6. It goes to show the values that underpin our urban design and development – that we must harmonise economic and physical development with social, cultural and environmental needs. This is a people-centred approach to designing a liveable city of the future.

7. Singapore must get this right. As a tiny island state, there is no room for error. Our development is thoughtfully designed and implemented to support our policy objectives.

8. One example is the environment, and the way we have used our drains and canals. Located at the Equator, we need an efficient drainage system to manage the heavy downpours we often get. It is not difficult to find big concrete canals in many parts of the country.

9. About 10 years ago, we decided to turn these drains into “Active, Beautiful, and Clean” water bodies. We converted unsightly canals into meandering rivers, seamlessly integrated with parks, and populated with canoes and boats. What used to be unsightly concrete features have become vibrant waterways for the community.

10. Another example is our social policy of racial and religious harmony where everyone is treated equally, regardless of creed. Our community and living spaces are designed to support this. From our unique street food, or hawker food as we call it in Singapore; to public housing, places of worship and schools. Let me elaborate.

11. Our hawker food used to be sold on the streets. To improve hygiene and sanitation, we created hawker centres to house our food vendors – or hawkers, as we call them. Hawkers of Chinese, Indian, Malay and other races operated side by side. Over time, they influenced one another in their use of spices, ingredients and cooking techniques, producing uniquely Singaporean flavours and characteristics.

12. These hawker centres are now found in neighbourhoods all over Singapore. There are options for everyone, including Halal food for our Muslims, and vegetarian food. They are more than just places for a good meal. They are common spaces for Singaporeans to take part in communal life. A society that eats together stays together.

13. In town planning, we design for a living environment that integrates the different races. As a matter of policy, our towns are multi-racial with different races living as neighbours to one another. We provide places of worship for different faiths

in every town. We ensure that our schools are multi-racial, where our children can learn their vernacular languages, and grow up with children of different races.

14. All of this shows our effort in applying thoughtful urban design to the process of development. It is not just for the aesthetics, but to meet policy needs; supported by an appreciation of people's needs and aspirations.

15. Singapore is happy to share our own experiences in these areas, and learn from fellow Member States. So I warmly invite all Member States to join us for the 2016 World Cities Summit in Singapore next July. It will be a chance for global leaders to share practical insights in urban development, and the design of liveable and sustainable cities.

16. Mr President, I have shared these thoughts on Singapore's journey of development to illustrate the natural affinity between our priorities, and UNESCO's noble mission. We will build on this to forge deeper partnerships with UNESCO.

17. Singapore is proud to be part of UNESCO's global action to build peace among all nations.

Thank you.