

**ADDRESS BY MR DESMOND LEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE
“TREES OF THE WORLD” LIGHT-UP ON 29 NOV 2016, 7.00 PM, AT
THE SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS**

Excellencies,

Mrs Christina Ong,
Chairman, National Parks Board

Prof Leo Tan,
Chairman, Garden City Fund

Mr Kenneth Er,
CEO, National Parks Board

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good evening to all of you. It is a particularly nice time to be here at the Botanic Gardens. It usually gets cooler and more comfortable in the evenings. It is also the year end, and the festive season is almost upon us. With the impending light up of the “Trees of the World”, our UNESCO World Heritage garden will be even more magical.

2 For those of us who travel, it is not uncommon to see many cities and urban areas which are devoid of urban greenery, where greenery isn't necessarily an integral part of the cityscape. Three 'rationalities' account for this:

- a) The first is that greenery isn't so “quantifiable”. For example, if you construct a housing block, you can say that homes

have been provided for x number of people. For greenery, the benefits are often more subtle.

- b) Second, greenery is less “immediate”. Unlike a new road for instance, there is no “immediate” need in many urban planners’ minds, for greenery.
- c) Third, greenery is often taken for granted. It’s all around us and it is common property. We enjoy it without realizing how important it is or how much effort it takes to maintain it.

3 Thankfully, our pioneers had pushed hard to green up Singapore over the past 50 odd years.

4 And our efforts will continue and will not let up.

5 In our *City in a Garden* today, we benefit from the shade offered by mature trees along our streets, and they do take years to grow. We also benefit from parks which we can enjoy with our families and friends, and rich biodiversity in our nature reserves and nature areas that we can cherish and celebrate for future generations.

National Archives of Singapore

6 A great deal of effort goes into conservation and greenery. Some of us may not know this, but the Botanic Gardens spanned 23 hectares 150 years ago. Today, it is almost three times bigger, despite our land scarcity. This year, we unveiled plans for the Keppel Discovery Wetlands, a freshwater forest wetland right in the heart of our city. Just last week, Minister Lawrence Wong launched the Jurong Lake Gardens Public Engagement. This brings us one step closer to our first national gardens in the heartlands.

7 It may seem effortless, but what we enjoy is the result of painstaking and long term work.

8 In fact, just look around us at the beautiful festive landscaping. I was here a week ago for a Friends of Ubin Network meeting, in the daytime. I saw our NParks colleagues from SBG and NOG working very hard to put all of this together for the benefit of Singaporeans and visitors.

9 The reality is that greenery requires careful maintenance. It is also vulnerable to the environment, and to competing needs for development. So it takes some effort to safeguard and grow what we have today.

The community as part of this meaningful mission

10 This is not just a Government effort. Our natural heritage and our green spaces belong to all Singaporeans. Their conservation and enhancement is therefore, always a community effort. All of us here are stewards of this heritage.

11 I am happy to say that Singaporeans from all walks of life contribute in so many different ways. Some of you donate to support our greening efforts. This helps provide resources to conserve and develop our green spaces.

12 Others give your time as volunteers. In fact, it is community support that makes our species recovery and habitat enhancement work so successful. I must also add that our Friends of the Park Communities and all who are involved in them also play an important role. These

volunteers work tirelessly to spread the conservation message and to upkeep our green spaces. Right here in the Botanic Gardens, we also have volunteers who conduct our guided tours. In fact, we now have over 25,000 volunteers helping us in all our green efforts.

A gift to the Botanic Gardens is a gift to the next generation

13 I would like to take the opportunity to launch another way that people can contribute to our push to continue greening Singapore. It is called the “*Give to the Gardens*” programme – which is a fund where individuals and corporate partners can help to fund further outreach and research by the Botanic Gardens.

14 The outreach efforts of the Botanic Gardens are already well known. They include public concerts, floral displays, movie screenings, and heritage tours.

15 The Gardens' research role is less well known, but no less important.

16 The Gardens is a world-renowned botanical research institution. It is the prime repository of botanical specimens in this part of the world, housing about 750,000 samples that are the authoritative specimens of these species. Some of these date back to the 1880s. In fact, one of my first visits to the SBG when I joined MND was to see the repository, and I was amazed by the scientific value of the collection there. The research done here adds to overall conservation efforts in Singapore.

17 Your donation will help the Gardens go further. In this regard, I would like to thank our long-time supporters and partners who have already pledged contributions to this fund.

Spreading the love of greenery through photography

18 I'm also happy to launch the second "*Singapore Garden Photographer of the Year*" competition.

19 This year, there are three themes - "*Gardens and Landscapes*", "*People and Nature*" and "*Our BiodiverCITY*". The competition is open to both professional and casual Photographers. I have seen previous editions of this competition, and the standards are very high.

20 You can view some of the best works from the previous competition at the CDL Green Gallery. These pictures really capture the beauty of nature.

Conclusion

21 Let me end by just thanking all of you for being such strong supporters of our greening Mission. We greatly appreciate your donations, your feedback, your effort, your time, and everything you have done to help us. You are a big reason why we have a lush and verdant Singapore.

22 I wish everyone a wonderful evening and a great festive season. Thank you.
