

**NATIONAL STATEMENT BY MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
AND WATER RESOURCES OF SINGAPORE
MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI,
AT THE THIRD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT
ASSEMBLY, 5 DECEMBER 2017**

Mr President of UN Environment Assembly Edgar Gutierrez,

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

INTRODUCTION

- 1 As a densely populated city state, Singapore, from its early days, has had to grapple with the challenges of balancing economic development with preserving a clean, green and liveable environment.

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- 2 Pragmatic policymaking based on sound economic principles and science, a focus on long-term planning, and the ability to mobilise popular support have been crucial in Singapore's sustainability journey. Such an approach is no less relevant today as we tackle pressing environmental challenges such as climate change and pollution.

SINGAPORE'S APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3 This year is the 40th anniversary of the cleaning up of the Singapore River, a herculean endeavour that aptly reflects our approach to sustainable development. In the 1970s, the Singapore River was terribly polluted and was literally an open sewer. As part of a long-term plan to meet burgeoning water needs, we worked hard over a decade to clean up the catchment area of the Singapore River, resettling thousands of farms, factories and street hawkers. The support and involvement of the people of Singapore were crucial. Today, the Singapore River has been radically transformed. It is clean and beautiful – a place for recreation, and a source of drinking water.

4 Sound policy-making, long-term thinking and the mobilization of broad support are just as relevant today.

5 For example, to tackle air pollution, Singapore has steadily enhanced our air quality standards for industry and transport over the years, taking into account economic and health studies on the impact of air pollution.

- 6 On this evidence, we have crafted policies to justify incentives to encourage the early replacement of older and more pollutive diesel commercial vehicles with new models that meet Euro 6 standards. We have also imposed a volumetric diesel tax.
- 7 Over the long-term, these policies bring benefits in improved air quality. This in turn gives better health for our citizens and sustains a liveable environment for our people. They also discourage the use of fossil fuels and help fight climate change.

TACKLING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES THROUGH NATIONAL AND GLOBAL ACTION

- 8 Mr President, national efforts to address pollution are critical, but they are insufficient. Pollution is also a regional and international issue that requires multi-lateral action. As countries work together to address environmental problems, we similarly need to apply the principles of sound policy-making, long-term thinking and mobilizing broad support.

ENSURING CLEAN AIR

9 **Let's take air pollution.** Under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, ASEAN members have been working together to prevent, monitor and mitigate haze. All ASEAN members have ratified the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. The successful implementation of this agreement will go a long way towards achieving a haze-free ASEAN by 2020. This has also sent a strong signal to agro-companies to adopt sustainable practices. The regional and world communities do not condone forest burning to clear them for agriculture.

ENSURING CLEAN OCEANS

10 **Second,** ensuring clean seas and oceans is another area where national policy intersects with international efforts.

Singapore has a direct interest in keeping our waterways clean, because we collect and treat every drop of water, both used water and stormwater, for potable use. To address sea-based marine pollution, we have rolled out initiatives on clean and green shipping, some of which go beyond the standards set by the International Maritime Organisation.

11 **Third**, we ensure that our solid waste is well managed within our shores and not dumped into the sea. We have done this well; but we do not stand still because we strive to become a Zero Waste Nation. Technology will play a big role and we will invest in R&D to achieve this. We will also involve our citizens and industries to play their part to reduce waste in the first place and separate waste properly to maximise resource recovery. Ultimately, very little should go to the landfill, and nothing to pollute the sea.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLLUTION

12 Mr President, climate change is closely interlinked with pollution. Our policies should also aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve them together. As nations come together to address climate change, part of this lies in how we also address pollution.

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13 Our policies should also aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as we try to tackle pollution from gas emitters. In Singapore, for instance, we not only adopt policies to promote cleaner and greener transport, but have also announced a freeze on private transport growth while growing public transport options. Such policies will preserve the environment and fight climate change at the same time.

14 Singapore will also be introducing a carbon tax in 2019 to send an economy-wide price signal to encourage emissions reductions and the adoption of low-carbon technologies. It will complement our wide-ranging climate mitigation measures to achieve our pledge under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We know that as companies adopt energy-efficient alternatives to reduce their carbon footprint to avoid this tax, they will inevitably also reduce emission of other pollutive substances.

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15 Ultimately, change comes from each citizen being aware and inspired to care for the environment. That is why Singapore is designating 2018 as the Year of Climate Action, when we rally the whole nation to come together to do our part for the environment and our climate.

MOBILISING BROAD SUPPORT

16 Mr President, beyond strengthening co-operation between countries, international bodies like UN Environment also play an important role in mobilizing support from all stakeholders, including the citizens of each country.

17 Government efforts alone are not enough. We need the support of citizens and businesses for sound environmental policies that bring long-term benefits but require near-term adjustments on their part. Hence, I am glad to see many more ground-up initiatives in Singapore to promote sustainability and fight climate change.

18 Civil society groups such as Singapore Youth for Climate Action, #LepakinSG, PM Haze, Plastic Lite, Zero-Waste SG, WWF-Singapore, Forum for the Future, and Save that Pen are encouraging Singaporeans to shop sustainably. Plastic-Lite Singapore has initiatives to reduce the use of single-use plastics. Such ground-up efforts are bearing fruit as companies respond to consumer demand, for example, by getting their products certified for sustainability.

Businesses in Singapore are also joining the fight against climate change and pollution. For example, the Singtel Group, a major Singaporean telecommunications company, has pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions across its Singapore and Australian operations. Siloso Beach Resort has pledged to procure sustainable palm oil and use environmentally-friendly toiletries. Other companies that have pledged effort to reduce pollution, including carbon emissions, are City Development Limited, and Swire Pacific Offshore. The efforts by our civil society groups and companies are highlighted in the voluntary commitments that they have submitted.

CONCLUSION

19 Mr President, let me end by returning to the story of the Singapore River. The restoration of the Singapore River is testament that with vision, determination and unity, we can take concrete steps towards a pollution-free planet. Singapore stands ready to contribute.

Thank you, Mr President.