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Singapore Government

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OPENING ADDRESS BY MR LIM SWEE SAY, MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AT THE CLEAN WATER FORUM ON WEDNESDAY, 28 JUNE 2000, 8.30 AM AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ACACIA BALLROOM

Dr Cham Tao Soon, President of NTU

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Every year, Singaporeans consume about 230 million cubic metres of clean water. If we include non-household consumption, the total consumption of clean water in Singapore comes to more than 400 million cubic meters a year.
2. Even though there is enough clean water for every person, factory, restaurant and so on here in Singapore today, we should never take the supply of clean water for granted.
3. Just think about this. There are 6 billion people in this world. One in 5 have no access to clean water. Half of them have no access to proper sanitation. Only half of the people in the world today are fortunate enough to enjoy both clean water and proper sanitation.

4. It is not because there is insufficient water in this world. After all, 2/3 of the world's surface is covered by water. Rather, it is because only 2.5% of all water is not salty. Of these 2.5%, 2/3 is locked in icecaps and glaciers. Of the remaining 1/3, 20% is found in areas too remote for human access, and another 60% come at the wrong place and at the wrong time, in monsoons and floods.

5. After factoring in other hydrological considerations, we are left with access to only 0.08% of the total water resources in the world. On top of all these, this precious amount of 0.08% of water resources is unevenly distributed across populated areas.

6. Singaporeans are therefore fortunate to be amongst the half of the world that enjoys both clean water and proper sanitation. We should never take this for granted because without sufficient supply of clean water, our quality of life will suffer.

7. Looking back to the 20th century. The world population multiplied threefold but water consumption multiplied sixfold. Looking ahead to the next 25 years, the picture is not necessarily any rosier, as the availability of per capita renewable water resources is projected to fall by 27%. Environmental pollution and poor water management will continue to degrade the quality of many water sources.

8. Left unchecked, the world will be faced with increasing shortage of fresh water in a new age marked by rapid technological advances. It is indeed ironical that four billion people will be living in high water stress areas, in an era where we talk about completing the sequencing of the human genome!

9. All over the world, we can expect that demand for water for industries, energy production, agriculture and human consumption will continue to rise. Singapore is no exception. Our water demand will continue to grow as our population heads towards 5.5 million, and as our industries continue to upgrade towards high tech industries such as wafer fabrication and the emerging life sciences.

10. We have to ensure that there will be enough clean water to meet our growing water demands for many more years to come. We must therefore continue to manage the supply, use and pricing of water well. The Ministry of Environment will do its part by guarding our precious water resources vigilantly to keep them clean and safe from pollution. The PUB will do its part to supply

piped potable water to everyone and every home, by scrutinising all viable sources of water supply and spearheading the national desalination program. Singaporeans will have to play our part too. We need to step up our water conservation efforts, and make sure that every precious drop counts.

11. Our challenge is to adopt an innovation-driven mindset in our quest for creative solutions to meet our water needs. One increasingly important approach is to leverage on advanced technologies to expand our options in water sourcing and water purification.

12. The Clean Water Forum provides an important platform for representatives from academia, the private sector and public sector to come together to exchange views on the development of new water technologies, and examine how they can be best applied in our local context.

13. I am therefore pleased to see this co-operation between NTU, Stanford, the Public Utilities Board and the Ministry of the Environment. By teaming up with research institutions from both locally and abroad, PUB and ENV will be in a much better position to stay abreast of cutting-edge water technology. This will help ensure that Singapore continues to have a safe and reliable water supply.

14. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all participants for your contribution in helping to boost Singapore's capabilities in clean water technology. I wish you a constructive and fruitful Forum.

15. It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Clean Water Forum officially open. Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore
