

**STATEMENT BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AT THE 35<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO) ON 7 OCTOBER 2009**

Mr President of the General Conference

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board

Mr Director-General

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am honoured to be here today to address the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Let me take this opportunity to commend Mr Matsuura for his strong leadership as Director-General of UNESCO over the past decade. I also wish to congratulate the new Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova who takes over this important and heavy responsibility after this General Conference.

2. To further strengthen cooperation between Singapore and UNESCO, we have recently appointed a Non-Resident Ambassador to UNESCO to facilitate our commitment as a member to advance developments in education, science, culture and information.

**ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL**

3. Singapore supports UNESCO's priority on "*Education For All*" as education is the best investment we can give our children. Singapore also agrees wholeheartedly with UNESCO that competent and committed teachers are key to achieving "Education For All". Just last year, we organised a UNESCO Educators Workshop for educators from the Asia Pacific region to exchange best practices on teaching and learning. Recently, with UNESCO's support, 9 African principals attended the 9<sup>th</sup> World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals in Singapore, which allowed them to exchange ideas with over 1000 principals from around the world.

4. We are enhancing the quality of education in our primary and secondary schools but hiring more and better teachers and improving the curriculum. This will include the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century dispositions and skills in addition to the strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. We will spend more to upgrade our technical education and polytechnic sectors. We are building a New University in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a top Chinese university.

**FOSTERING CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

5. In the area of culture, Singapore has a natural affinity to UNESCO's commitment to preserve and promote cultural diversity. Singapore is a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, where different communities thrive in diversity but are united by our common identity as Singaporeans. Our arts and cultural sector plays a critical role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and celebrating our multicultural values to forge that common identity.

6. Singapore's Renaissance City Plan articulates our vision to be a Global City for the Arts and to promote cultural content that reflects our unique identity. Our museums and Heritage Centres showcase our Asian cultural roots and history, as well as the diverse cultures of the ASEAN region.

7. Singapore has also supported the UNESCO "Memory of the World" project for the digitisation of ancient manuscripts, in collaboration with UNESCO Phnom Penh. The opening of Singapore's National Art Gallery in 2012 will help us play a greater role in the research, scholarship and promotion of South-East Asian visual arts and culture. We will partner UNESCO Member States to promote greater cultural and professional exchanges.

#### **ENHANCING ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

8. Singapore supports UNESCO's strategic objectives of enhancing access to information and knowledge, so that members of society are well-informed and engaged in learning.

9. By 2015, a next-generation wireless infrastructure in Singapore will provide all our residents high-speed access to the global information highway. Our libraries too are leveraging on technology to build knowledge networks with regional and international partners. Last year, the Singapore National Library Board Academy organised an international conference that brought together 200 library practitioners and thought leaders from the region to deepen their expertise and professionalism.

#### **MOBILISING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

10. Singapore supports UNESCO's goal of 'mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development'. As a small country, we benefited much from the application of science and technology to overcome limited resource constraints. We are working with UNESCO to jointly promote knowledge-sharing and networking among Asia's foremost water institutions and professionals through the partnership agreement signed between the Singapore Public Utilities Board, UNESCO-IHE Institute of Water Education and the Asian Development Bank.

11. At the national level, Singapore has set up a new Inter-Ministerial Committee for Sustainable Development in April this year to conceptualise a blueprint for the next 10 to 20 years. S\$1 billion has been set aside to implement the Committee's recommendations which include more energy efficient buildings, eco-friendly public housing and clean transport.

12. We are happy to also once again host the World Cities Summit in June 2010, following a successful inaugural Summit last year. The World Cities Summit next year will bring together thought leaders, to focus on two important themes for sustainable development – Creating Vibrant and Liveable Cities, and Building Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Cities.

#### **Conclusion**

13. UNESCO serves as a bridge to facilitate greater sharing and collaborations among Member States, in a globalised world where countries despite their different contexts, face similar challenges and opportunities in education, science, culture and

information. Singapore is committed to participating in this important and meaningful endeavour so as to improve the world for future generations to come.

14. Thank You.

National Archives of Singapore