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**SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT, AT THE URA'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER  
AT THE ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL  
ON FRIDAY, 30 MARCH 1984 AT 7.00 PM**

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When our government took office in 1959, it inherited a city that was literally choking itself to death. Living conditions in the city were appalling. More than a quarter million people were crammed into an area that was no more than one per cent of the total land area of Singapore. Diseases like tuberculosis were rampant because of the extreme overcrowding and the lack of proper sanitation. The crime rate in the city was high. Traffic was chaotic, the inevitable result of a road network that was not built for motor cars and had clearly outlived its purpose.

The task for the government was a difficult one. Singapore was a gigantic urban slum that had to be quickly rebuilt into a modern twentieth century city. But, before that could be done, the population had to be rehoused from their crammed cubicles in the city into decent, clean and modern homes. In 1960, the Housing & Development Board was formed. The Board immediately embarked on an ambitious national housing programme. By the mid-'60s, the Board had surpassed its target under the first five-year programme with the completion of more than 54,000 housing units. At the end of 1964, 400,000 people, or almost a quarter of the total population at that time had been housed in HDB estates.

With government now in control of the housing problem, it was ready to tackle head-on the problem of rebuilding the city. The Urban Renewal Department was

established within the HDB to take on the job. The priorities were quite clear - an intensive programme of slum clearance, resettlement of those affected and development of the Central Area as a regional tourist, financial and commercial centre.

Slum clearance was affected by instituting legislation that made it possible for government to acquire and assemble land for comprehensive redevelopment including the provision of infrastructure like roads, drains and sewers.

Housing and other resettlement facilities like shops, markets and hawker centres were planned and built to accommodate those affected by the clearance programme.

Urban renewal requires massive investment, and cannot succeed on government initiative alone. The government's role is to clear and assemble land, and provide infrastructure for development. Private developers would build the shops, offices and hotels. The Sale of Sites programme, first launched in 1967, provides the mechanism whereby private enterprise is encouraged to participate in the redevelopment of the city. Within three years of its launching, 44 projects had been sold to private developers. The programme sparked off a spate of building activity in the Central Area that continues to this day. To-date, 143 projects covering 158 hectares of land have been initiated under this programme, generating a total investment of almost \$9 billion. In terms of supply of completed commercial floor area in the Central Area, the programme has contributed 25 per cent of office space, 68 per cent of shopping floor space and 22 per cent of hotel rooms. The percentages are expected to increase steadily with the completion of projects currently under construction.

The pace at which urban renewal was implemented could only be possible if a special agency was created for this purpose. Such an autonomous statutory body would have the flexibility, manpower and financial independence to effectively implement the urban renewal programme. The Urban Redevelopment Authority was established by an Act of Parliament on 1 April '74 to plan, guide and implement all redevelopment in the Central Area.

Today, as URA celebrates its tenth anniversary, we can all justifiably pride ourselves on the progress we have made in trying to create a clean and beautiful city. However, we have still some way to go in our renewal process. While the thrust of the effort in the sixties and seventies was slum clearance and generating growth and employment in the Central Area, URA's role had in recent years gradually shifted from that of a direct implementation agency to that of planning and co-ordinating the orderly growth and development of the city.

The challenge ahead for URA is to shape the city's continued growth and development. We have to create an urban environment that has carefully planned landscaped open spaces, pedestrian walkways, co-ordinated building designs and an integrated road and MRT transport network. This will make the city an even better place to work, live and play in.

The creation of a better city cannot be done in a vacuum. URA must bear in mind the fundamental factors that will influence the city's development in the future. Some of these key factors are:- the rate of economic growth, the impact of the MRT on travel patterns and consequently, land use and development intensity, the 690 hectares of reserve land in the Marina City, the effect of computerisation and office automation on work patterns and finally, the changing aspirations and way of life of Singaporeans.

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