

**SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE SINGAPORE
GARDEN FESTIVAL 2008 APPRECIATION PARTY AT
THE SUNTEC CITY CONVENTION CENTRE ON 1
AUGUST 2008 AT 6.30 PM**

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It was only a week ago that I opened the Singapore Garden Festival 2008. We all had our fingers crossed, that the response would be good. As one designer told me, we have done what we can. Now it's up to the public.

SGF 2008 – Another Good Showing

2 When the Festival started last week, I said that we were aiming to raise the bar higher, to better our last Show in 2006. Judging by the standards of the exhibits, the accolades that I have heard, and the response from the public, we have succeeded.

3 The international designers, exhibitors and judges have told me that Singaporeans should be very proud of the Festival. They were impressed by the quality of the Show, the diversity of the talented exhibitors that we have managed to attract, and also the enthusiasm and commitment of the people who organised the Show.

4 Jim Fogarty, the award-winning designer from Australia said, “I think the Singapore Garden Festival now has a firm position on the international gardening calendar.” His parents, Stephen and Patricia Fogarty, who visited the show had this to say, “We are so glad we made the effort to visit this year and to see for ourselves the show which has become such a well-known event on the gardening calendar.”

5 David Davison, the renowned designer from South Africa told Ng Lang that he had participated in more than 20 shows, including winning several Gold’s at Chelsea. However, he thinks that this is by far the most exciting show that he has participated in. Minister Lim Swee Say shared with me that he had met with another two designers who had been involved in other world-class shows for many years.

They told him that “the standards of the SGF is even better than these other world class flower shows”. They added that we “should not brand it as Asia’s Premier flower and garden show. It should instead be the **World’s** premier flower and garden show!” As Ng Lang thanked them for the compliment, he added that it is better for such recognition to come from others, than for us to make our own claim. Quite so. Let us acknowledge the accolades but keep our feet on the ground. We still have many more shows to go to truly make it world class.

6 Another measure of progress is the visitor numbers. **We wanted the Festival to reach out to more people, both locals and tourists. In just 8 days, the Show has attracted 300,000 visitors. This surpasses the visitorship of 200,000 for the inaugural show in 2006, which was held over 10 days.** This year, we have also added an Expo and Conference event at the start of the

Festival to facilitate exchange of ideas and networking for the industry. The SGF Expo and Conference has likewise received resounding support, attracting about 3,000 visitors.

7 The credit for the success of this year's Show must go firstly to the wonderful team at NParks. To Wong Wei Har and her dedicated organising team, "you have done a tremendous job!" I am told that for the last 3 weeks, you and your team have been working 18-hour days, arriving at Suntec everyday at 7am and only leaving at 1am the next day. And yet, you have kept your spirits up and your smiles bright so that you can give visitors the best experience possible.

8 Many other NParks staff have also offered their precious time and contributed in many other ways to the success of this massive Show. Your involvement as guides, ushers, in plant quarantine, decorating the place, logistics

and traffic movement, your attention to every small detail, have contributed significantly to setting the right mood for the Festival and to the positive experiences that visitors enjoy.

Significance of Singapore Garden Festival

9 The Singapore Garden Festival has become an important event for Singapore, and its significance goes beyond just being an international garden show. The Festival is now a key part of our strategy to transform Singapore into a City in a Garden. The Festival will help raise the standards and professionalism of our landscaping and horticulture industry, grow Singapore into a centre for horticultural excellence, and strengthen our brand name as a premier garden city.

10 More importantly, the Festival will also help to mobilise greater community participation in Singapore's greening efforts. I am particularly heartened by the enthusiastic

participation of our community gardening groups in this year's Festival. We are seeing more people taking up an interest in gardening, greenery and our natural environment.

11 Having now raised the standards, and therefore the expectations, of the Singapore Garden Festival, it will be an uphill task for us to do even better for future shows. I think this is a pleasant challenge to relish. We will continue to expand the scale of the event, its sophistication, outreach, and the level of community participation. But we can't do it alone without your support. We hope that all of you – the industry, sponsors, associations, participants, well wishers – will continue to play vital roles in our future shows, with your participation and investment, your artistry and creativity, your enthusiasm and hard work. Together as a team, we can continue to make miracles of the Singapore Garden Festival.

Conclusion

12 But, for tonight, just enjoy the evening, mingle with friends from the Festival, and remember with pride the highlights from the show.

13 Thank you all.