

WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR NG LANG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL PARKS BOARD, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE GARDEN FESTIVAL EXPO 2008 AT SUNTEC CITY CONVENTION CENTRE ON THURSDAY 24 JULY 2008 AT 9.30 AM

Minister for National Development, Mr Mah Bow Tan

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning and a very warm welcome to the inaugural Singapore Garden Festival Expo 2008 (SGF Expo 2008). I want in particular to welcome our guests and participants from abroad and wish you a fruitful and enjoyable stay in Singapore.

I also want to thank our Guest-of-Honour, Minister Mah Bow Tan, for joining us this morning. Minister Mah has been a major champion of the current greening efforts in Singapore and the Singapore Garden Festival. Minister, we are very honoured to have you here to officially open SGF Expo 2008.

An international event

Entitled “Changing Landscapes, Global Opportunities”, SGF Expo 2008 is aimed at creating a platform for the landscape and horticulture

industry to share ideas and technology and explore collaborations and business opportunities. Organised as an integral part of the Singapore Garden Festival, SGF Expo has a conference component for exchange of ideas and a trade show to bring together buyers and suppliers of landscape and horticultural products and services.

This is an exciting time for the landscape and horticulture industry. Amidst rapid urbanization, cities across the globe are adopting green policies more than ever before to improve the quality of their living environment. Against this backdrop, we are very glad to have the opportunity to put together this gathering to jointly explore opportunities for growth, collaborations and business links. And we are pleased that this inaugural event is already shaping up very well as an international event, with 20 countries represented here. In the next two days, you will be hearing from distinguished speakers from the US, Europe, the Middle East, China, Australia and Southeast Asia. They will be sharing insights on trends and best practices in their own regions and areas of specialization. At the trade show, we are pleased to have the support of exhibitors from 13 countries showcasing plant nurseries, horticulture products, design consultancy, new technology and services. Delegates

from 17 countries have also participated in the event's hosted buyers programme.

Singapore's greening plans

In Singapore, the greening of the city was started more than 40 years ago by a government that was committed to creating a quality living environment. Today, despite rapid urbanization, we have managed to keep almost 50% of the island covered in greenery. And the same government is committed to do even more. In our latest draft masterplan for urban development, the government has committed another 900 hectares of land to parks in the next 15 years. In total, almost 10% of the island's land area is committed to parks and nature reserves.

At the same time, much thought have also been put into enhancing the quality of our green space, in areas like design, relevance to the lifestyle of an increasingly sophisticated population, environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation. In a land-scarce city with a population of 4.6 million on only 700 sq km, we are also interested in innovative and creative solutions to enhance our green space without compromising our ability for further economic growth and development.

In practice, this search for quality and new solutions are seen in new exciting projects in the city. One such project is not far from here in a new business district by the name of Marina Bay, where we have carved out reclaimed land along the waterfront to develop three world-class gardens called Gardens by the Bay. When the first phase of the gardens is completed in 2011, it will house the largest cooled conservatory in the tropics for conserving and displaying tropical montane and Mediterranean plants.

Another exciting project is the ongoing work to construct some 300 km of park connectors to link our suburban centres and recreational facilities to parks and coastlines. About 100 km of the park connectors have been completed and it is very satisfying to see how they are helping to enhance the lifestyle and recreational needs of the population. When the park connectors are all linked up, a centre feature that we are all looking forward to is a 150-km round-island route that will enable us to walk, run and cycle around our whole country.

A third major project is a plan to activate our waterways and integrate them with our green space to increase the space for waterfront

housing, recreation and leisure, and the same time improve our capacity for water sustainability. In the first pilot project that we have implemented, the softscaping of a stretch of concrete waterways very quickly brought back wildlife. It shows the potential of this project for adding another layer of excitement into our cityscape.

Elsewhere, in both private and public housing development projects, we are experimenting with vertical and rooftop greenery to provide a new experience in green living.

Potential for innovations and test-bedding ideas

All these projects have created vast opportunities for innovations and test bedding of new ideas and technology in the area of urban greenery. And the reward is often tremendous when we manage to find the right solutions. For instance, it takes huge efforts to maintain the large number of mature trees that lined the roads in the city. This is an important function because every tree failure can potentially result in a nasty accident that threatens lives and properties. By applying a combination of new management techniques and technology, we are now able to reduce our tree failure rate by as much as 60% compared to six years ago.

Last year, we created the Centre for Greenery and Ecology (CUGE), to spearhead efforts to advance and share knowledge in urban greenery. In the short span of a year and a half, the centre has made very good progress, both in its efforts to raise local standards and to start collaborative projects with partners abroad. It is also taking the lead to champion new ideas, like the Green Mark for Parks, a certification programme to benchmark the environmental and social sustainability of parks. It is our hope that through SGF Expo 2008, we can find many more new partners and ideas that we can adopt and share in our journey going forward. Already, I am happy to announce that on the sides, we will be signing a MOU with the Australian Institute of Horticulture to formally embark on collaborative projects that we hope will benefit both sides.

Networking Opportunities

The Singapore Garden Festival, which opens tomorrow, is the only garden and flower show on the international calendar to bring together the world's top award-winning garden and floral designers. The first show that we organized in 2006 was very successful, and gave us confidence that it can be developed into a major flower show of

international standing. This year, we are happy that the show has attracted the participation of 34 top designers from 17 countries. So in the next few days, together with conference speakers and participants, we will be having a very high concentration of very talented people in our industry under one roof. A series of technical visits and networking events have been organized. I hope you will be able to benefit from these sessions to network and to visit major projects like the Gardens by the Bay and an ongoing exhibition of our draft masterplan for the city for the next 15 years.

In conclusion, I want to thank all our speakers, participants and friends for coming to lend us your support at this inaugural event. It is my hope that we will continue this partnership and collectively build SGF Expo into a major platform to provide growth opportunities for the industry and champion ideas for the betterment of our urban environment.

I wish you a most enjoyable and rewarding conference.

Thank you.