

# A meeting of great minds

St Gallen Symposium programme is the leading platform for youths to meet and work with today's leaders, reports **JAMES SOH**

EACH year in May, the Canton of St Gallen in Switzerland becomes an international hub where decision-makers from the fields of business, academia and politics as well as outstanding students from established universities around the world gather at the University of St Gallen Campus to participate in a constructive dialogue, exchange views, and address a subject of particular importance in today's world. Topics along the lines of Seeking Responses in Times of Uncertainty, Just Power, Risk in Today's Complex Society, to name a few, were covered in the St Gallen Symposium in previous years.

The St Gallen Symposium, formally known as International Student Committee (ISC), was introduced to Singapore through the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Council with the support of the Embassy of Switzerland in 1999. Students from the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University have been invited to participate in the St Gallen Wings of Excellence Award. Each year, students from all over the world are invited to submit an essay on a specific topic set by the St Gallen Foundation. The aim of the competition is to identify 200 exceptionally talented students throughout the world who, through inspiration, diligence and originality, contribute to the discussion on issues of the times and therefore qualify for a travel scholarship to participate in the prestigious St Gallen Symposium.

Now in its 13th year, three national universities, namely the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) are fully engaged in the programme. Students from these three local universities are selected to participate in this programme. Based on population, Singapore has one of the highest proportions of students selected for the St Gallen Symposium year after year.

Three senior cabinet members had been invited to deliver the keynote address at the St Gallen Symposium thus far. In 2000, then Education Minister and Second Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean was the keynote speaker. In 2003, then Minister for National Development, Mah Bow Tan, visited St Gallen to address and highlight to the international community Singapore's response to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis. The event was an excellent platform to highlight Singapore's strengths in managing such outbreaks. Finally, Minister for Finance Tharman Shanmugaratnam delivered the keynote address on Government in the Post-Crisis World: Will Larger Be Better? at the St Gallen Symposium 2009.

Among many of Singapore's senior officials invited to address the St Gallen Foundation are Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and Beh Swan Gin, managing director of Singapore Economic Development Board.

The gathering of outstanding students in St Gallen each May is a truly unique occasion. These students, who come from various backgrounds, are motivated and ready to embrace the world from their own perspectives. Students are selected through the largest essay competition of its kind, the St Gallen Wings of Excellence Award, where 200 of the world's most outstanding young essayists are invited to St Gallen for the Symposium.

Over the years, many undergraduates from Singapore's three universities were invited to the St Gallen Symposium, which is coordinated in Singapore by the NYAA Council. This opportunity provided them a fully sponsored trip to St Gallen, Switzerland to participate in the forum, attend lectures and special sessions by political and world-class business leaders and meet with fellow undergraduates from top universities worldwide.

In 2010, the Knowledge Pool was introduced. The Knowledge Pool completes the group of Leaders of Tomorrow and consists of about 100 young personalities who are specially selected from a global pool of talents. Since its introduction, seven outstanding National Youth Achievement Award Gold Award recipients have been invited to join the Knowledge Pool. Students from Singapore who are selected based on their outstanding achievement and contributions have benefited greatly from this programme.

During the pre-programme, the Leaders of Tomorrow meet each other and build a community prior to the symposium. The aim is to give the Leaders of Tomorrow the opportunity to exchange their thoughts on a topic and to get prepared for the debates with the leaders of today. As an integral part of the St Gallen Symposium, the Leaders of Tomorrow Pre-Programme is a distinguished asset of the entire experience and is highly regarded by our young participants.

The St Gallen Symposium programme is the leading platform for inter-generational dialogue, where the youth meet and work together with today's leaders. Since its introduction to Singapore in 1999, it has provided more than 200 Singaporean students an excellent platform to interact with outstanding students from various parts of the world, leaders in the field of politics and business, decision makers, international media and members of the civil society in a very conducive environment at the beautiful campus of the University of St Gallen.

*The writer is executive director, National Youth Achievement Award Council and Adviser to the Knowledge Pool, Leaders of Tomorrow Programme, St Gallen Symposium*



The gathering of outstanding students in St Gallen each May is a truly unique occasion. These students, who come from various backgrounds, are motivated and ready to embrace the world from their own perspectives.



**Unique occasion:** Josef Ackermann with Mr Mah (right) at the International Student Committee