



**Welcome Address by
Mr Martin Tan, Executive Director, Institute for Societal Leadership,
SMU
at the Inaugural Societal Leadership Summit 2015
Thursday, 26 November 2015, 9am
Mochtar Riady Auditorium, Administration Building,
Singapore Management University**

Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, Singapore Management University

Prof Arnoud De Meyer, President, Singapore Management University,

Your Excellencies, speakers, advisory board members, distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to the inaugural Societal Leadership Summit.

You can probably tell from many of our faces that we are pretty excited that this is happening. Not because of the fact that after this summit, our long awaited holiday begins, but rather, today marks a key milestone in the journey for the Institute for Societal Leadership.

What started as purely an idea to invest in a new term called Societal Leadership, has led us over the past two years to travel to all 11 Southeast Asian countries to understand from those doing good on the ground, what pressing challenges we face as a region, what innovative solutions they have been embarking on but more importantly, what questions are not yet asked but need to be asked.

I remember at our very first Advisory Board meeting, we presented to a room of esteemed board members, some of whom are present here today, our bold plans to take the region by storm. We had ideas to run large scale youth programmes and hold conferences to invite people from around the region to participate. I remember being proud of what we had put together and how ambitious we were. And I remembered their advice.

Start small. Listen the ground. Understand the needs. Take your time to build up your resources.

In our fast paced world of key performance indicators and quarterly reporting, it was to many of us a breath of fresh air. It gave us confidence that we are in this for the long haul.

And so we did just that.

While Asia remains our focus, we've decided to start with Southeast Asia our focal point for the next few years. We conducted country insights labs in all 11 Southeast Asian countries meeting over 260 societal leaders from across the government, academia, media, civil society and business sectors. *(I'm very excited to have our Academic Director Dr Lim Lai Cheng to present our insights in our later session and introduce the Country Insights Labs monograph.)*

We also conducted interviews with elder statesmen, senior business civil society leaders to collect their leadership insights and oral history through our Digital Narratives of Asia initiative so that we can learn from them what worked in the past and perhaps, apply in the present.

We've also met many societal leaders who are doing tremendous work in their communities of which very few know of. So we started Catalyst Asia as our way of sharing with the region the good that others are doing and sharing perspectives and opinions on issues facing all of us in this region. Our latest issue of the magazine is in your participants' bag and I'm happy to share with

you that our website containing over 90 articles from the region goes “live” today. You can visit it at catalystasiastories.com.

Instead of running major youth programmes, we started with just 44 high school students in our BlueSEAL programme in 2014 and 25 undergraduates for our Southeast Asian Global Undergraduate Leaders Programme (SEAGULL) in 2015. With a small group, we were able to go deep in many of our conversations regarding key issues in this region and how as a network of young leaders, they can create collaborative opportunities amongst themselves made possible by technology.

And in the same vision of building networks of leaders, we launched our Service for Asia Fellowship with 3 young working professionals who have decided to take a pause in their career to serve the region. Each of them is deployed in the 18-month fellowship to another Southeast Asian country not of their own to immerse themselves in issues, and getting hands on experience in the solutions. They will go back to their corporate lives with a far greater understanding of the needs on the ground, with a class of fellows they can count on to do something significant together.

Here is a video that encapsulates our programmes and our aspirations.

In these two years leading up to today, we’ve met incredible people, learned about the impactful work their organisations are doing, regardless of the sectors they come from. But we have also learned that the issues are often no better than they were before because fundamentally, many of these issues, are wicked problems, problems that are complex and problems that cannot be solved by any one sector alone.

We’ve learned that while there are many answers and solutions being explored today, there are also questions that remain to be asked. One such question is the one we are asking today. What is societal leadership and is that the approach moving forward?

In all honesty, we don't know yet – but it is a good starting point.

At ISL, our working definition of Societal Leadership is the practice of creating sustainable value and impact for the betterment of society within one's largest sphere of influence.

We believe that regardless of where we are, what stage of life we are in, we can create value and impact for the community around us in a sustainable fashion.

How will societal leadership look like being lived out in our region? What does it mean to be a Societal Leader? All these are questions we are continuously asking. We don't have answers yet but with your partnership and contribution, I believe wholeheartedly that we will.

The excitement for us is the very fact that we are trying to find out the answers.

This summit is as much an exploration as a milestone for us. It marks the first time we are bringing societal leaders from across the region and sectors together. With current and emerging leaders from over 19 countries present today, there is much we can do together.

A good friend and New Zealand author Dr Mark Strom said “Communication is about the sharing of created meaning. Conversation is about the creating of shared meaning.” We've designed the sessions as conversations instead of communicating all the thoughts we have decided on.

We hope with this approach, we will have greater conversations over the next two days about the many issues that matters to us. It is our dream that the summit will not be a collection of ideas but the collective creation of new ones. That it will be the creating of shared meaning for the common good for all in this region.

Have a great summit ahead. I hope we'll make your time impactful and meaningful.

Thank you very much.

It brings me great pleasure now to invite on stage someone whom many would agree to be amongst those we would look up to as a societal leader. Someone who has created great sustainable impact for the betterment of society in the spheres of influence he has had.

Ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together to welcome on stage, the Chairman of SMU, Mr Ho Kwon Ping to deliver his opening address.