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Launch of SMU Urban Institute

SMU Hall, 9.30am, 17 January 2024

Remarks by SMU Urban Institute Director Associate Professor Orlando Woods

Guest of Honour, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of National Development Ms Sim Ann;

SMU Chairman Mr Piyush Gupta;

SMU President, Professor Lily Kong;

Distinguished panellists, guests from Singapore and overseas,

Colleagues and friends,

Good morning.

Whilst many urban planning and design models might draw on the examples of Western cities, it has become increasingly important to learn from the Asian urban experience to better understand how to address the challenges faced by our fast-growing cities. As cities grow in complexity, we need to take a human-centred approach as opposed to building more buildings and installing more infrastructure. As we heard from Senior Minister of State and Mr Gupta this morning, the SMU Urban Institute will place the social tensions that are part of this Asian growth story at the forefront of our research agenda. This way, we can provide better insights and solutions for a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future for city-dwellers.

But the question is, how do we do this in practice?

By forging a strong network of partner universities in Southeast Asia and beyond. Our Memorandum of Understanding with the Thammasat Design School of Thammasat University

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provides a first, tangible step forward for our urban research agenda for Southeast Asia. The MOU will see us collaborating on joint research programmes by sharing data, documents and materials; coordinating joint lectures, workshops and symposia; and facilitating the exchange of faculty, and students working on urban-related research questions. Looking ahead, we hope to develop more partnerships with stakeholders in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and beyond.

To achieve this, SMU is already in talks with the University of Melbourne and the University of Toronto to build collaborative urban research agendas. With the University of Toronto, a joint grant call has been hosted successfully to foster collaborative urban-related research. Similarly, plans are underway to collaborate with the Melbourne Centre for Cities on a joint event for ASEAN city leaders at the upcoming World Cities Summit in Singapore.

Overall, these partnerships reveal the collaborative, multidisciplinary, multicultural and forward-looking trajectory that underpins the research agenda of the SMU Urban Institute. The Institute aims to connect Singapore and Southeast Asia, and also bring urban research with a Southeast Asian perspective to the world. In this vein, it will be the first research institute in Southeast Asia to speak to the plethora of challenges facing Asia's cities, from the heart of urban Asia.

Given how fast the cities of today are developing, and how much urban landscapes around the world are changing with more intense competition for resources, it is imperative that we have a strong network of research partners to lead a new wave of urban research that is firmly rooted in Asia.

With that, I would like to express my thanks to our valued partner from Thammasat Design School, Assistant Professor Asan Suwanarit, Dean, Architecture and Planning Faculty, Thammasat University. I am delighted that we are officiating our partnership today via this MOU, and look forward to a fruitful collaboration in the coming years.