

SPEECH BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF SMU URBAN INSTITUTE ON 17 JANUARY 2024, 10AM, SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY HALL

Mr Piyush Gupta, SMU Chairman
Professor Lily Kong, SMU President
Dr Orlando Woods, Director of Urban Institute,
Distinguished guests,
Members of the SMU Community,
Ladies and gentlemen

1. A very good morning to all of you.
2. It is my pleasure to be here at the official launch of the Singapore Management University's (SMU) new Urban Institute, and let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to SMU on such an important milestone.

Evolution of Singapore's Built Environment

3. In the early days of Singapore's independence, we experienced acute urban challenges, such as overcrowding, urban slums, traffic congestion, environmental pollution, floods, and water shortages.
4. Through visionary planning and careful execution, we witnessed the remarkable transformation of our urban landscape.
 - a. Today, diverse housing options, modern workplaces, and green spaces are meaningfully and harmoniously interwoven to create vibrant and resilient neighbourhoods.
 - b. This was achieved through the principles of stewardship adopted by our early planners.

- c. These same values continue to guide the way that we plan and shape our built environment, to meet new challenges in an evolving urban context.

Mounting Urban Challenges

- 5. Like many cities in the world, urban planning and design in Singapore must consider the impact of climate change, ageing infrastructure, and limited land resources, among other factors.
- 6. As urban pressures continue to mount, there is benefit in having deeper and broader conversations and collaboration, among cities.
 - a. For instance, the urban solutions developed by Singapore has attracted the interest of other cities around the world, as many of them face challenges similar to our early constraints.
 - b. At the same time, Singapore continues to learn and adapt good practices from others.
 - c. Together, we can better meet the increasingly complex and interconnected challenges facing all of us.

Importance of Taking an Interdisciplinary Approach

- 7. This brings us to the crucial role that SMU's Urban Institute can play.
 - a. With its commitment to forging an interdisciplinary research agenda, the Institute will not only bridge diverse fields of research and branches of sciences, but also unite the various stakeholders from both the industry and academia, spanning across different regions.
 - b. This approach will enable the Institute to build upon the wealth of existing initiatives to advance research and ideas across three pillars – Urban Life, Urban Growth, and Urban Infrastructure.

8. First, the Urban Life pillar explores what shapes a city's liveability and how place-making can contribute to enhance the diversity and the vibrancy of the city.
9. Meanwhile, the Urban Growth pillar investigates the strategies for equitable access to urban services such as housing and employment opportunities, and to reduce socio-spatial inequalities and foster a more inclusive society.
10. Finally, the pillar of Urban Infrastructure analyses the impact of both hard and soft infrastructure on urban development and resilience, for example in response to hazards such as climate change.
 - a. As an example, our Singapore Green Building Masterplan sets out comprehensive strategies across the building life cycle, including behavioural strategies to cultivate a sustainable building sector.
 - b. This aims to not only lower our carbon footprint but also to provide a healthy, liveable, and sustainable built environment for all.
11. These pillars are therefore not just conceptual frameworks; they represent a holistic approach towards creating a more liveable and sustainable urban environment.

Taking a Long-term Perspective to Planning

12. The pillars and vision of the Institute align strategically with Singapore's land-use planning.
 - a. Our development plans were progressively brought to life over many decades through careful stewardship of our limited land and a steadfast commitment to planning for the long-term future of Singapore.

- b. This is especially critical as land pressures become increasingly acute and trade-offs harder to navigate.

- 13. Following the conclusion of the Long-Term Plan Review in 2022, URA has now embarked on an ongoing public engagement exercise for the Draft Master Plan 2025.
 - a. In reviewing the Master Plan, the government will translate the long-term strategies into detailed plans that will be implemented on the ground over the next 10 to 15 years.
 - b. Our engagement effort will be done in concert with stakeholders from all walks of life, so that we can shape the future of Singapore together and ensure that we realise a Singapore that is sustainable, inclusive, and anchored on a strong sense of identity.

- 14. With many competing needs as well as the increasingly diverse aspirations of Singaporeans, the decisions on our future land-use plans will inevitably involve making difficult trade-offs, which will affect different stakeholders.
 - a. Hence, just as the Urban Institute brings together a multitude of entities, stakeholders and views, we hope that through constructive dialogue and open conversations, we can foster a deeper understanding among planners and Singaporeans.
 - b. In this way, we can better consider the wide range of needs, interests, and aspirations, and how they can be accommodated within our small island nation.

Conclusion: Urban Institute as a Centre for Urban Research and Regional Partnerships

15. The establishment of the Urban Institute signifies SMU's commitment to developing empirical insights, theoretical understandings, and practical solutions to a wide variety of urban challenges.
 - a. Going beyond traditional research, the Institute aspires to play the role of an interface for scholars, policymakers, communities, and industry stakeholders to come into meaningful contact and engagement with one another.

16. I am heartened by the Urban Institute's emphasis on regional partnerships, starting with the Memorandum-of-Understanding (MOU) to be signed with Thailand's Thammasat University today, as well as ongoing discussions for research partnerships with institutions in Toronto and Melbourne.
 - a. Such partnerships highlight the Institute's global perspective and collaborative spirit, and represent not just academic collaborations but serve to connect diverse perspectives and experiences that are essential for addressing the intricate challenges faced by cities.

17. SMU's Urban Institute will play an important role in promoting the exchange of experience and research between Singapore and our regional neighbours, and in helping policymakers and practitioners create a better built environment for all.
 - a. The journey ahead is exciting, and I look forward to the progress of SMU's Urban Institute towards cultivating thought leadership and offering innovative solutions to create a more sustainable, inclusive, and liveable urban future. And I represent the MND family in extending my warmest congratulations and good wishes. Thank you.