

2025 Reach Conference

19 November 2025

10.20am – 10.25am

Welcome Remarks by Professor Lily Kong

1. Mr Eric Chua, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Social and Family Development

Fellow Alliance members,

Ladies and gentlemen.
2. On behalf of the Singapore Management University, I warmly welcome you to the 2025 Reach Conference and to Singapore.
3. Jointly organised by SMU and the University of Toronto alongside fellow members of the Reach Alliance, this Conference has been a year in the making.
4. With so many of our valued partners in one room converging around a shared sense of purpose, this conference is significant for several reasons.

5. First, it is inclusive. We live in an epoch where multiple forces impact and impinge on human lives, including AI, climate change, geopolitical tensions, and intercommunal tensions. Amidst this complexity, communities can only thrive by bringing together multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral stakeholders to solve challenges together. The REACH Alliance exemplifies this inclusive approach to addressing societal needs.
6. One just needs to glance around this room to see that this ‘polycene task force’ assembled here. Over the next few days, your diverse perspectives will find fertile ground here in SMU, and bringing your inclusive value system into conversation will enable solutions that matter.
7. Second, it is inspiring. The Reach Alliance is a global rallying point at a time when countries have increasingly raised walls and looked inwards. This has made societal challenges even more challenging, particularly for marginalised communities. The Alliance’s work inspires and reminds us that when partners work together, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

8. This is why SMU aspires to be a reliable bridge between regions. It has been three years since our work within the Reach Alliance began, and our hosting of this conference underscores SMU's commitment to be a gateway for the Alliance to Asia. We have strengthened our gateway role through our network of SMU Overseas Centres in Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta and soon, Shenzhen, China.
9. Third, it is based on actionable insights for impact. This conference marks 10 years of the Reach Alliance walking the talk, by exemplifying how universities – through teaching, research and service – can address societal challenges while nurturing changemakers. Our actionable insights lead to real-world solutions, co-created with and for marginalised communities.
10. This mission of impact resonates strongly with all of us at SMU. As a global city university with our feet firmly planted here in Asia, SMU is committed to addressing the societal challenges of our time through impactful research and actionable scholarship. Making impact cannot just be rhetoric or even a goal setting exercise. It must be a responsibility. As such, we placed our impact agenda front and centre in our new strategic plan towards 2030 – to make a vital difference in

human capital development, knowledge creation, economic development, and social and community life.

11. We will nurture graduates who are future-ready, globally attuned and socially conscious, and invest in research that addresses complex challenges to shape the future of societally critical areas. This requires strong partnerships across borders and between sectors to drive innovation and create real-world impact for the communities we serve.
12. SMU and the Reach Alliance are thus very aligned.
13. Over the next few days, this Conference will unpack and build on over 10 research themes for action towards a more sustainable, enduring and inclusive society. We will also meet with local communities to see first-hand how policies, research and action can work in concert to improve the wellbeing of migrant workers in Singapore. I am confident that the outcomes here will set the stage for the Reach Alliance's next decade of excellence.

14. And as a proud alumna of UCL – I shall not spoil the surprise too much – I am especially looking forward to the Reach Conference next year, which will undoubtedly blow more wind into our sails.
15. I conclude by thanking my colleagues at the University of Toronto for their friendship and partnership – for working closely with us to make this first Reach Conference in Asia a reality.
16. Let us work together to turn today’s insights and ideas into actions that will transform lives tomorrow. Thank you.

<690 words or 6 min at 110wpm>