



**STATEMENT BY MR JULIAN GOH
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AT THE SECOND PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETING FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE
URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III),
14 APRIL 2015**

Mdm Chair,

1 At the first PrepComm at the United Nations in New York in September, Singapore shared our view that the new urban agenda should be based on three goals – a high quality of life; a competitive economy; and a sustainable environment. I thank you for allowing me to elaborate on this today.

2 In 1968, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of modern Singapore, said:

“The improvement in the quality of our urban environment and transformation of Singapore into a garden city – a clean and green city – is the declared objective of the government.”

3 Then, Singapore was a city with poor infrastructure, deplorable sanitation, and traffic congestion. Nearly three quarters of our population lived in housing akin to squatter settlements. We were a city of immigrants,

divided amongst ourselves. Riots and strikes were common. Unemployment was high. However, Mr Lee set for us a clear goal - a clean and green city, an equitable city.

4 Through decades of collective, undeviating perserverance, I believe Mr Lee saw his vision become reality. Ninety percent of our citizens own their homes, mainly in public housing. Nearly fifty percent of Singapore is sheltered by green cover. Two thirds of the island contributes to our drinking water reserves. We achieved this through long-term planning and good governance. We are grateful to Mr Lee, and all our urban pioneers, for their leadership, dedication, and sacrifice.

5 Of course, there are always new challenges, and we are constantly learning from others in striving to overcome them. Singapore would not have been able to accomplish what we have on our own. Singapore's journey was possible with the assistance of the international community, not least the United Nations. UNDP wrote our first economic plan and assisted in our first State and City Planning project in the 60s. The World Health Organisation's consultants put together preventative measures that contributed to Singapore's pollution control. The United Nations' leadership and expertise was vital then, and is still crucial now.

6 Singapore also learnt from other cities and countries. As Mr Lee stated: "We are not the only city. There are

thousands of other cities and we can see the mistakes they have made. We can also see what they have done right.” We learnt land reclamation from the Netherlands, quality control from the Japanese, water treatment from the United States, and vocational education from Germany, just to name a few. We learnt and built on these lessons.

7 Today, Singapore is “paying it forward”. We have worked with China on the Tianjin Eco City and Suzhou Industrial Park. Recently, we began working with India on a new capital city for the state of Andhra Pradesh and with Sri Lanka on a city plan for Colombo. We’re not only working on the hardware, but also the institutional frameworks. We’ve also provided technical assistance to cities on implementing action plans through our training programmes for city leaders.

8 I’m happy to announce that earlier today, Singapore launched a new collaboration with UN Habitat - a capacity development programme - to step up our efforts to help build capacity in governance and planning in cities around the world. In doing so, we hope to contribute to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, as envisioned by Sustainable Development Goal 11.

9 This new programme complements Singapore’s efforts to encourage exchange of best practices and sustainable urban solutions through various platforms, such as the biennial World Cities Summit, Singapore

International Water Week and Clean Enviro Summit.

Mdm Chair,

10 Singapore believes that improvement in the quality of our urban environment - to achieve a high quality of life, competitive economy and sustainable environment – is an achievable objective for *every* government. The phenomenon of urbanisation can be harnessed as a positive force for sustainable development. As a cross-cutting issue, urban sustainability can be the foundation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It requires government institutions with strong political and technical expertise that are able to address complex issues in creative ways to achieve sustainable, liveable cities.

11 The need for urban sustainability is urgent. Mr Lee once said of Singapore: “We are just one small island, if we were to spoil it, we’ve had it”. Similarly, we are only one small planet. If we were to spoil it, we’ve had it.

12 I thank you for your attention.

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