



STATEMENT BY MR DESMOND LEE  
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TO THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND  
SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)  
AND SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
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Mr President,

1 Singapore thanks the government and people of Ecuador for your generosity and gracious hospitality in hosting the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). We also thank the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat III and the Co-Facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the New Urban Agenda, for the excellent work done over the past two years.

2 The inclusive preparatory process for Habitat III has enabled all states, big and small, and key stakeholders including at the city-level, to contribute to setting the international urban agenda for the next 20 years. As a highly-urbanised city-state, Singapore has participated actively in the process.

3 We are encouraged that Habitat III builds on the milestone agreements reached in 2015, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We are gratified to hear that the ratification requirements for the Paris Agreement to enter into force have been met. Singapore ratified the agreement on 21 September 2016, which further affirms our support and commitment for global climate action. Together with the New Urban Agenda, these agreements provide us with the tools to achieve sustainable development for all.

4 We are now putting into place steps to ensure that we will fulfil our post-2020 climate pledge. For a start, Singapore has recently released our Climate Action Plan – two complementary publications that outline our latest plans to address climate change, including key strategies that we will be taking to achieve our Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). One core strategy continues to be the improvement of energy efficiency across all sectors, given our limited access to alternative energy options with our small size and geographical limitations. We

will also continue to explore new innovations in low carbon technologies, such as electric vehicle technologies, and renewable energy options such as solar energy. The benefits to be reaped from such innovations will also contribute greatly to helping fellow countries achieve their NDCs and make global sustainable development a reality.

5 Urbanisation can be a significant driver of sustainable development, as cities provide us with important economic and social opportunities for growth. At the same time, various challenges such as environmental degradation, climate change, poverty and social inequalities pose risks to the development of cities. Today, we are here to renew our commitments to address these challenges and embrace the possibilities that urbanisation creates for sustainable development.

6 While there are no easy solutions to the challenges of urbanisation, the New Urban Agenda sets out various principles and approaches to guide sustainable urbanisation, including the vital importance of integrated, long-term urban policies and strengthening urban governance for sustainable urban development.

7 Singapore has been pursuing sustainable urban development for the past 50 years. As a small island city-state, we are even more vulnerable to the challenges of urbanisation. Despite our constraints, by adopting long-term planning that allows flexibility and innovation, we have been able to find practical solutions to our challenges and build a competitive economy while preserving a quality living environment for our people. Our water management strategy is a good example. Singapore does not have natural resources, including water, and this will be a permanent existential constraint. Through integrated planning, sound and pragmatic water management policies and continual investments in water infrastructure and research, we have made considerable advances from our initial circumstances as a fledgling nation facing serious water shortages, lack of sanitation and frequent floods. Nevertheless, we cannot be complacent as our demand for water will increase as our economy and population grow. Our Public Utilities Board (PUB) has projected that by 2060, Singapore's water demand may double from today's 430 million gallons a day. Thus, imported water from neighbouring Malaysia remains critically important to us. We also continually look ahead to develop innovative water treatment solutions to address potential water challenges, and turn vulnerability into opportunity. In collaboration with private and public sector partners, we have added high-grade reclaimed water (known as NEWater) and desalinated water to our water supply portfolio. We will continue to invest and innovate in sustainable urban water solutions. We recently announced a further US\$145 million (SGD\$ 200m) in grants for water research and development, bringing the total water R&D funding to some US\$485 million (SGD\$ 670m) over 15 years since 2006. We hope that technologies and capabilities developed in Singapore can also help other cities facing similar water challenges.

8 Another important ingredient in our development journey has been a long-term and

pragmatic approach to governance; an approach which is fundamentally inseparable from sound institutions and a culture of integrity. In 1986, a building in Singapore collapsed due to shoddy construction. This not only shook the trust in buildings, but in their stewardship. We addressed this by improving the standards and accountability mechanisms for building and construction, and set up effective governance institutions to manage it. Today, our Building and Construction Authority continues to keep high building safety standards in our densely built environment, and is also at the forefront of sustainable and green building technologies as well as the development of a friendly living environment for all – including people of different abilities and ages. Furthermore, we support the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) as an implementing agency to develop national plans and frameworks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the building sector in our region. And I am also pleased to note that Singapore’s “Accessibility Master Plan to create a user-friendly built environment” was selected by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) as one of the best practices in its publication “Good practices of accessible urban development” which will be presented at this Conference.

Mr President,

9 Moving forward, Singapore will work to translate our commitments made here in Quito into concrete action.

10 We believe that the unique conditions and needs of each country should be recognised. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for all cities and all states, there is room for us to work together to share best practices and support each other to implement the New Urban Agenda. International partnerships and cooperation can play an important role. Singapore’s own development journey would not have been possible without the support and assistance from international organisations and other states.

11 Such partnerships include knowledge platforms and capability development programmes that allow cities to learn from each other’s best practices, to jointly innovate and collaborate to address common urban challenges.

12 Building on this spirit of international cooperation, Singapore has just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN-Habitat at Habitat III, under which we will cooperate to provide capacity building support and technical assistance to cities from developing countries. In our small way, Singapore hopes to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda through this partnership.

13 In addition, Singapore hosts the biennial World Cities Summit, held in conjunction with Singapore International Water Week and CleanEnviro Summit Singapore; key knowledge platforms which bring together global government leaders and industry experts to address liveable and sustainable city challenges and share integrated urban solutions. We welcome all

cities to participate in the 2018 summits in Singapore.

Mr President,

14 Singapore is committed to play our part to realise the aspirations we share in this milestone Conference, and to create cities that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all our future generations.

15 Thank you.

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