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**"Sustainable Environmental Management in Urban Asia" Conference
at the National University of Singapore**

Opening Remarks

by

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His Excellency, Ambassador Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Chair, Programme Advisory Committee, Master of Science in Environmental Management, National University of Singapore

Professor Tan Eng Chye, Deputy President and Provost, National University of Singapore

Professor Nicholas Robinson, University Professor for the Environment, School of Law, Pace University, New York, and Adjunct Professor, School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University, USA

Professor Heng Chye Kiang, Dean, School of Design & Environment, National University of Singapore

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking the National University of Singapore for honoring the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) by inviting me as the Guest of Honour for this conference. I am deeply honoured and pleased to be here with you to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the National University of Singapore's Master of Science in Environmental Management (MEM) programme with the theme "Sustainable Environmental Management in Urban Asia".

Asia's strength and resilience, typified by Singapore as a well planned city-state, has become clearer to many of us and the world at large during the ongoing global financial and economic turmoil, which continues to threaten some of the very core foundations of the financial system in the developed world. Climate change is also another global challenge affecting all of us. The recently concluded 17th Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC in Durban, South Africa, has agreed to the Durban Platform which includes a road map which commits countries to negotiate

a protocol, another legal instrument or an "agreed outcome with legal force". This is expected to be agreed by 2015 and come into force no later than 2020. This will include all UN member states, unlike the 1997 Kyoto Protocol which will also be extended but with, perhaps, even fewer developed country participants than in the first phase. In any case, it will be overtaken by the new agreement when it comes into force.

Durban is to be followed by the much anticipated Rio+20 event which will take place between June 4-6, 2012 in Brazil and will, hopefully, be more concrete in identifying sustainable development actions. I would like to recall here that the original Rio Conference in 1992 was chaired by Singapore through its then Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Tommy Koh, the dinner keynote speaker today, who is also here at this opening ceremony. I would like to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to him, on behalf of UNDP, and the UN as a whole, for his many important contributions over the years to the UN, the wider international community and, of course, to Singapore.

Ladies and Gentlemen

2012 is also the year of Sustainable Energy for All, which has three global targets: providing universal access to modern energy services, doubling energy efficiency, and doubling the share of renewable energy in the world's energy supply. Indeed, embracing a positive climate change agenda will require nothing less than a re-orientation of the global economy towards a low carbon one which, in reality, will be an extremely challenging task. Nevertheless, building a green growth and low carbon path to development should also be viewed as an important opportunity for both developed and developing countries.

While most efforts to tackle climate change so far have been focused on isolated, distinct, and often competing goals utilizing traditional approaches to either mitigation (lowering emissions) or adaptation (reducing vulnerability), the international community clearly needs to take much bolder, comprehensive and

integrated measures if we are to achieve success as defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other experts. Committing all countries to an equitable , and I stress this because of what just happened in Durban where many developing countries governments and observes feel the Convention's principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibility appears to have been de-emphasized, agreed "outcome with legal force" before 2020 and establishing an Adaptation Advisory Committee are two important steps in this direction agreed in Durban last weekend. A fully funded Green Climate Fund with USD 100billion per year from 2020 will be as essential, especially for developing countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finding ways to make human development progress truly sustainable for the seven billion people on our planet, of who half live in cities, as well as for new generations to come, remain a central challenge of the 21st century. The effects of urbanization and climate change are converging in ways which threaten negative impacts on the urban quality of life and economic development. The fact that population growth rates in most cities are higher than national economic growth rates is alarming, particularly in developing, and especially the least developed countries. Significant increases in city growth are expected in the next few decades, both spatially and in terms of the number of economic activities concentrated in urban areas. Most cities also have large numbers of poor people and this population is likely to increase significantly over the next few decades with rural to urban migration unless effective and appropriate measures to halt and reverse this are put in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cities concentrate people and their homes, along with physical capital, industry and waste. They are vulnerable to climate change by virtue of their complex interconnected systems. Based on dense, interacting networks of

communications, transport and trade, cities are susceptible to sudden disruptions and may not be able to recover fast enough if proper planning is not undertaken at the very outset design stage. Moreover, a failure in one system is likely to have knock-on effects on many others. The proximity of industries in a concentrated place can also be hazardous, exposing tightly-packed households not only to pollution and disease but also to extreme hazards and hardships in emergencies, given the very many constricted spaces in cities which are difficult to evacuate. It should be highlighted, however, that this risk is not an inherent characteristic of cities but rather a consequence of poor planning and that, as a result, the extent of the risk can be mitigated by good planning, even if it can not be altogether avoided.

Looking at the main sources of GHG emissions, cities and urban dwellers are responsible for around two-thirds of the world's energy use –for heating and cooling of buildings, for cooking, as well as for transport and industrial production. Indeed, cities account for approximately 67 per cent of global energy demand, mainly from coal, oil, and natural gas, the main contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. That proportion is expected to rise to more than 73 per cent by 2030 according to a study by the International Energy Agency. Waste contributes to around three per cent of global emissions in Asia-Pacific cities, where, with rising affluence, the middle classes are creating increasing volumes of waste that are either burned to produce CO₂ or dumped in landfill sites that are significant sources of methane.

Climate change will put further pressure on urban social services particularly water supplies, sanitation, food supplies and electricity. Urban areas draw natural resources from rural areas and then return this in the form of waste, either in solid or liquid or in the form of air pollution. Urban areas also generally have better access to services than rural areas even though the quality of urban social services is dubious for poorer residents and these will, most likely, be further strained by climate change. Sanitation systems will also be under further stress, compromising hygiene and increasing the risk of water-borne disease.

It is crucial, therefore, that in the future, citizens across the Asia and Pacific region are better informed about climate change, and city governments offer residents sufficient support to adapt to and mitigate its effects. We should also turn this crisis into an opportunity. A well planned city provides an opportunity to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as well as our carbon footprint. Prioritizing sector clustering and strategic urbanization programmes will transform cities into attractive places to live, where creativity and lifestyle are emphasized. The concentration of professionals in the city should also spur urban dwellers to greater innovations, through which strategies can be catalyzed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve adaptive mechanisms and reduce overall vulnerability to the impact of climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2011 Asian Green Cities Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit indicates that richer cities such as Singapore and Tokyo generally perform better than poorer cities such as Kolkata or Karachi. In the case of Singapore, for example, such stronger performance is partly a reflection of the city-state's wealth, part of which can be and is invested in environmental protection. But it is also a consequence of leadership which has consistently emphasized the importance of sustainable development. Singapore has also benefitted from some influential environmentally aware residents, an integrated planning system and effective policy implementation.

Initiatives already underway here such as the expansion of public transportation networks, the "birth control" policy on cars, Green Mark Certification for buildings, diversification of clean water resources and the use of recycling technology including waste-to-energy (WTE) can be shared with other developing countries. However, these initiatives are clearly related to a number of Singapore's strengths, including the concentration of human and financial capital, well-functioning communication networks, as well as influential, environmentally informed citizens. Other cities may currently not have this combination of positive attributes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2011 UNDP Global Human Development Report, titled “Sustainability and Equity” was launched this year by the Danish Prime Minister, Ms. Helle Thorning-Schmidt and Ms. Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator in Copenhagen, Denmark on November 2. This report addresses a central challenge of the twenty-first century: simultaneously achieving equity and environmental sustainability by treating them not as independent issues, but as goals which are inextricably linked to continued human development progress. This year’s Report offers powerful arguments for making development more equitable to make it more sustainable – both for people today and for new generations to come. It argues that the technology, the good policy models, and the resources exist and that equity and sustainability for all can, therefore, be achieved.

This perspective can and should inform the ongoing debate on sustainable development as the world prepares for the Rio+20 Summit. It should also help guide our thinking on the post-2015 framework for global development goals and action, after the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which has a target date of 2015.

From UNDP’s human development perspective, the main task is to protect the world’s poorest residents, offer them greater opportunities and significantly improve their quality of life. In the urban context, this is what all city administrations should already be prioritizing – by providing basic services, helping people gain better incomes and housing, and providing sufficient social protection, while fully incorporating the voices of those who are not normally heard in decision making.

Thank you.