

Two panels of historic Berlin Wall on display at NUS' University Town



(From left) Professor Tommy Koh, NUS Tembusu College's rector, Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan and Germany's Ambassador to Singapore Michael Witter at the unveiling ceremony on Oct 18, 2016. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

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SINGAPORE - A historical relic that had once symbolised the division of a nation along ideological lines was unveiled at the National University of Singapore (NUS) on Tuesday (Oct 18).

This time round, though, the two panels of the Berlin Wall were a gift of peace that cemented the strong ties between two countries.

They were given to Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) by Germany's Mr Elmar Prost and his building materials company, Lagerhaus KW GmbH, last year to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between Germany and Singapore.

They are on loan to NUS through the MFA for at least five years, and are on display at a garden behind NUS' Tembusu College in University Town.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan said at the unveiling ceremony that some had claimed that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented the "end of history" and marked victory for free trade and democracy.

But he said that a "fundamental choice" between "a world characterised by walls or an open world characterised by interdependence, mutual co-operation and win-win outcomes" still exists today.

"I hope these two artefacts will continue to inspire the next generation to reflect on the meaning behind these and realise that in fact the same profound questions confront us for the future," he added. About 30 guests had attended the ceremony.

Mr Prost, 57, had bought the two graffiti-covered panels in 1991. He had also donated wall segments to other countries including South Korea, Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

"This is to remember the German reunification as the (panels) should be a symbol for freedom," he told The Straits Times in an email, adding that his actions were also motivated by his desire to give thanks for the opportunities that he had received since the days of the Cold War.

Tembusu College also held a forum, The Historical Significance Of The Cold War, that examined contemporary implications of the war as well as lessons that can be learnt from the historical episode after the unveiling ceremony. It plans to organise other education programmes about the Cold War in the future.

"One thing that struck me was how a physical construct could represent a ideological separation," said Nguyen Manh Tri, 22, a third-year undergraduate studying economics. "The graffiti on the wall also represents the resistance against the separation at that time."

These two panels are currently the only segments of the Berlin Wall in Singapore. In 2010, four panels donated by friends of then Foreign Minister George Yeo, American oil industry veteran Robert A. Hefner III and his Singapore-born wife MeiLi, were exhibited at Bedok Reservoir Park for three years before they were returned to the couple in April, 2013.

Segments of the Berlin Wall can also be seen in more than 100 memorials around the world, including the Vatican City and Kingston, Jamaica.

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