

**Launch of NUS Vision, Mission and Values  
Speech by NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye**

**Wednesday, 15 August 2018**

Chairman and Trustees

Colleagues, Students, Alumni, Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

***“Shaping the Future”***

1. The short clip you just saw was a trailer produced for the National Day Parade that took place just last week. The Parade featured four inspiring, real-life stories of Singaporeans, a celebration of the Singapore spirit. It was a special moment for me as a Singaporean, and as President of this University.
  
2. The stories at this year's NDP were about the continual drive to do better, resilience in the face of adversity, and the collective impact of the community. Mr Veera Sekaran, who is played by the young boy in the video, is an NUS alumnus. The 5<sup>th</sup> of nine children of a road sweeper and a domestic worker, Veera overcame extreme poverty with help at crucial points in his life, and later graduated from NUS in 1987 with a Bachelor of Science in Botany.
  
3. Veera went on to curate innovative and sustainable landscapes in Singapore and around the world, including the Singapore Zoo, the Night Safari, and Changi Airport. But what stands out most is that Veera pays it forward by hiring ex-offenders at Greenology, the urban greening company he founded. Greenology is also open several times a week to

dementia patients and children with special needs. Veera couldn't join us today as he's currently overseas on a project.

4. As a university, we celebrate the impact Veera has made and continues to make, just as we are proud of the many NUS students, faculty, researchers, staff and alumni who are effecting change for the better, in their own distinctive ways. Some of them have put up displays in the Foyer, as part of a showcase of innovative and impactful projects at NUS. I thank our colleagues, students and alumni for making the effort, and for joining us today. I encourage everyone here to spend some time visiting these displays during the tea reception.

5. The people of NUS form the bedrock of this University – a very special institution founded by the community, for the community; a leading global university that is shaping the future. This is our vision for NUS, a higher purpose that is deeply rooted in our beginnings as the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School, which was established on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1905.

### **Our Roots**

6. At the opening ceremony in September 1905, which would have been Week 1 of our Academic Year, Sir John Anderson, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, said to the inaugural class of 23 students: "I am sure that you will realise the best hopes of the government and the community. It is to you that government looks especially. You are of the East, and to you they look, to break down the walls of native prejudice, and overcome ignorance. You have access the Westerner has not, to the inmost household in the East."<sup>i</sup>

7. While many harboured great hopes, few could have predicted that NUS would become Asia's best, an institution widely recognised as among the leading universities of the world. It is a testimony to the efforts of generations of dedicated students, faculty, researchers, staff, and alumni.

8. It is therefore with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the visionary stewardship and contributions of past NUS Vice Chancellors and Presidents: Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, and Professors Lim Pin, Shih Choon Fong and Tan Chorh Chuan. It is a great privilege and honour to follow in their footsteps.

### **To be a Great University**

9. During my listening tour in late 2017, and again in January this year, I spoke about how my colleagues and I aim to take NUS to even greater heights, beyond its strong standing as a leading university. I asked for your support, encouragement, and enthusiasm to transform NUS into a truly great university, to be among the very best in the world.

10. In subsequent discussions with the Board and senior colleagues, we agreed that NUS should aspire to be:

a. A leading global university, shaping the future;

b. A university that inspires and innovates for positive societal impact;

c. A vital, future-oriented community that works together in a spirit of innovation and enterprise;

d. An institution that pursues excellence in education and research, in service of the country and society;

e. A central node in a thriving and connected ecosystem of talented communities in Asia, and the world.

11. During our conversations about the next phase of growth for NUS, many of you told us that NUS' accomplishments, influence and impact provide further impetus for the University to be even more dauntless and inspiring in our efforts to shape the future.

12. One staff said: "NUS can be even more daring and bold in introducing changes. There will always be resistance to change, but as long as the vision is clear and the ground is sufficiently covered, the University should boldly push ahead."

13. Your insightful comments have given us much encouragement and motivation. I thank you all for your deep pride in NUS, and heed your call for this University to be even bolder in our Mission to educate, inspire and transform.

14. Dr Lee Kong Chian, the first Chancellor of the University of Singapore, said at his installation in 1962: "A university is not just an object of pride and prestige, nor only an instrument for acquiring knowledge and skills but also a home in which the human spirit can find freedom and true inspiration." <sup>ii</sup>

15. As a leading global research-intensive university, let me be very clear that education is - and always will be - at the heart of what we do. As a university, we have pioneered new models of education embodied by the NUS Overseas Colleges, University Scholars Programme, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Duke-NUS Medical School, University Town, and Yale-NUS College. Behind each of these high points is the desire to give our students the best possible educational experiences. And we will continue to do so.

16. NUS must also persist in inspiring members of our community, and those around us, to contribute to a better world. Last Saturday, our students raised more than \$581,000 for 21 charities under the NUS Students' Union's Rag and Flag 2018. It was a record amount! Since the year 2000, our students have raised more than \$8 million for Singapore beneficiaries through the annual NUSSU Rag and Flag events. They are truly, an inspiration to us all. Please join me in congratulating NUSSU President Jeffrey Lee, who is here today, and his team, on a job well done!

17. Other members of the NUS community have also made a significant impact across diverse fields over the years, and inspired change in areas such as design, entrepreneurship, law, medicine, technological innovation, public policy and sustainability through expert opinions as well as research discoveries and their application.

18. Today, we have close to 300,000 people who call NUS their alma mater. Six Singapore Presidents and Prime Ministers, as well as nine ministers in the current Cabinet are NUS alumni. We are equally proud of our alumni who are leaders across industry and civil society, among them social scientist and former United Nations Under-Secretary-

General Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, DBS Chairman Mr Peter Seah, Razer Co-founder and CEO, Mr Tan Min Liang as well as the many leading lights who are here with us today.

19. Many may remember that the late Professor S Shan Ratnam from NUS Medicine pioneered Singapore's in-vitro fertilisation programme. Prof Ratnam's work transformed the lives of many families, even to this day, with more than 6,000 assisted reproduction cycles done in Singapore each year for the last two years.<sup>iii</sup>

20. More recently, AI researcher Dr Feng Jiashi and his team at the Learning and Vision research group of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering have developed a new large-scale deep learning model capable of recognising one million faces at high speeds – to be adopted by Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs. Jiashi's facial analysis techniques will help to enhance our homeland security and contribute to the country's Smart Nation efforts.<sup>iv</sup>

21. Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, students and friends, our Vision is for NUS to be a leading global university, shaping the future. Our Mission is to educate, inspire and transform. Our Values: innovation, resilience, excellence, respect, and integrity.

## **Values**

22. The NUS Values will serve to guide our conduct as members of the NUS family. We deliberated long and hard over what these values should be, and felt that "innovation", "resilience", "excellence", "respect" and "integrity" best encapsulate the NUS DNA.

23. There are those within our community who already embody many of these values.

Besides Veera and our Rag and Flag students, we also have, among others:

- a. Professor Lim Chwee Teck, Acting Director of NUS BIGHEART and NUSS Professor at the Department of Biomedical Engineering. Chwee Teck's creative approach to human disease biology and biomechanics has led to innovative ways of diagnosing life-threatening illnesses from small amounts of blood to providing smart insole solution for diabetic foot ulcers. He has also co-founded one incubator and five start-ups that are commercialising technologies developed in his lab.
  
- b. Dr Susan Ang from the Department of English Language and Literature; Teaching Academy Executive Council Member. Recipient of the 2014 Outstanding Educator Award as well as multiple teaching excellence awards, Susan's passion for teaching is renowned, and she often challenges students to question critically. She's also been known to increase the number of tutorial sessions to keep the class sizes small, organise additional learning programmes beyond the classroom, and critique unsolicited essays.
  
- c. Professor Barbaros Ozyilmaz, Deputy Director (Translation), Centre for Advanced 2D Materials. Barbaros, whose research is in the area of experimental condensed matter physics, founded a world-leading graphene research group at NUS. A recipient of the 2013 Young Researcher Award, Barbaros has broken new ground on the many applications of graphene, ranging from spintronics, stem cell therapies and the development of a broad spectrum of devices, from solar cells to touch screens.

d. Mr M Thirukkumaran, who graduated last month with a Bachelor of Science in Business Analytics with Highest Distinction. Thiru persevered despite performing badly in his Secondary One and Two examinations, and emerged among the top students for the N-Level, O-Level and A-Level examinations. He was subsequently awarded the National Environment and Water Scholarship to study business analytics at NUS Computing.

e. And Assoc Prof Nga Min En from the Department of Pathology. Min En, a Teaching Academy Fellow and consultant pathologist at the National University Hospital, is behind the globally popular online pathology teaching resource named "Pathweb", which has visitors from as far as Argentina, Belarus and Egypt. Min En developed this website to package information for her students "in a logical way, to lessen their pain, and to help them understand better."

24. We greatly applaud the efforts by Veera, our Rag and Flag students, Chwee Teck, Susan, Barbaros, Thiru, and Min En in their journeys thus far. There are many others within our community who also display the NUS Spirit in their everyday efforts. Let us encourage and cheer each other on, as we continue to make a positive difference to those around us.

25. Ladies and gentlemen, for NUS to shape the future, to educate, inspire and transform, we must aspire to be a vital community of academics, researchers, staff, students and alumni that works together in a spirit of innovation and enterprise, to create a better world.

26. Our singular focus on talent will be the cornerstone of a truly great university, one that is dedicated to quality education, influential research and visionary enterprise, while serving Singapore and the world.

27. Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://sma.org.sg/UploadedImg/files/Publications%20-%20SMA%20News/4709/Insight.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://nus.edu.sg/president/pdf/fic2013.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/more-singapore-couples-getting-help-to-conceive>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.portfoliomagsg.com/article/cutting-edge-face-recognition.html>