

**PRE-RECORDED WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR DESMOND LEE, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA SINGAPORE PAVILION VIRTUAL LAUNCH ON FRIDAY, 21 MAY, 6PM**

**Introduction**

1. Good evening and welcome to the launch of the Singapore Pavilion at the 17th Biennale Architettura. To our international friends, thank you for joining us! Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are bringing the Singapore Pavilion to you almost entirely virtually. The team has put in a lot of work to put this together, and I would like to commend them for their efforts. I am confident that the Singapore Pavilion will still be able to showcase how good design and architecture have contributed to the liveability of Singapore, and our distinctive Singaporean identity.

***to gather : The Architecture of Relationships***

2. It is undeniable that the pandemic has changed the way people across the globe live, work and play. Large gatherings and events have become much less frequent, and we have had to adapt our ways of socialising and staying connected. Architects and planners are rethinking the design of the built environment in order to ensure public health considerations are safeguarded, whilst still being people-centric. And Singapore is no exception.
3. In this regard, this edition of the Singapore Pavilion has been aptly themed '*to gather: The Architecture of Relationships*'. Indeed, now more than ever, we must pay close attention to the interplay between human spaces and human connections. We must rise above the challenges and strengthen our social fabric. To this end, 16 local architecture, art and design projects have been carefully selected to showcase how Singaporeans gather and live together, mediated by thoughtfully-designed spaces. Through a variety of case studies, they demonstrate how an architecture of relationships can simultaneously strengthen both our city's resilience and social cohesion.

4. Amongst these are projects which focus on public spaces that Singaporeans use daily for recreation and leisure – places that are close to our hearts. Now one such example are hawker centres. For the benefit of our overseas friends, these are communal spaces with a variety of tenanted food stalls. Initially set up by the government in the 1970s as a more sanitary alternative to street-side hawking; today, we have over a hundred of them across our island, purposefully sited near public housing estates or transport hubs within easy reach of our residents. What is distinctive about our hawker centres is how they each contain dozens of individual stalls, each offering their own unique dishes spanning multiple local and international cuisines. Customers can and often do purchase dishes from multiple stalls, sharing them with friends and family, and visitors from all walks of life are welcome to dine and socialise with one another at the hawker centres. These places are indeed a microcosm of Singapore’s multicultural society, where we all coexist peacefully with one another. Singapore’s hawker culture is a recent addition to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Culture and Heritage of Humanity, and we are proud to feature these distinctive fixtures of our towns.
  
5. Besides our hawker centres, this year’s Pavilion also features a project on Pulau Ubin, an island northeast of mainland Singapore. The settlements on Pulau Ubin are called *kampung*, which are traditional villages that are found across various parts of Southeast Asia including Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Interestingly, the term *kampung* itself originates from the Malay verb *berkampung*, which means “coming together”. This etymology is manifest in the way houses on Pulau Ubin frequently function not just as homes, but as spaces for communal gatherings as well. I encourage you to visit the exhibit to see the carefully prepared architectural models and hear from residents who were interviewed by the project team.
  
6. Another project that we’re deeply proud of is *Kampung Admiralty*, an integrated public housing development that is a modern take on the *kampung* culture that is deeply rooted in Singapore’s history. In order to facilitate intergenerational bonding and provide convenient access to key facilities and services, a layered ‘club sandwich’ approach was adopted. Housing units for senior citizens are mixed with a community plaza at the lowest level, a medical centre at the middle level, and a community park with universally-designed apartments at the top level. These integrated services and

other social amenities have turned the development into the new heart of the community since its completion in 2017.

7. All these projects demonstrate that despite being land-scarce, we have continuously innovated when designing our built environment, in order to encourage social interactions and foster community ties. This has ensured that our city is both a quality living environment as well as a place our people can proudly call home.

## **Conclusion**

8. It is encouraging to see so many examples where our local architects and planners have thoughtfully wielded design to foster and strengthen relationships. As we continue to fight the current pandemic, it is imperative that we draw lessons from these examples. As we design new public spaces, we must seek to emulate how the simple open design of our hawker centres have become social spaces so dear to our people's hearts. Similarly, as we draw up designs for new condominiums and public housing estates, we must keep in mind the importance of bridging rather than deepening social divides, as the architects behind *Kampung Admiralty* have done. And we also must not lose sight of our roots despite our rapid pace of development. Pulau Ubin, with the communities and homes on it, remind us of our history, calling future generations of architects and planners to learn from the past and preserve our built heritage, even as we continue to reshape our city.
9. By creatively re-examining our built environment, we can continue to design new places and spaces that strengthen our societal fabric. This will help us emerge stronger from this pandemic. Together with the Biennale, we stand in solidarity with the global architectural fraternity to encourage architects locally and globally to strive for more inspirational designs that reflect an architecture of relationships.
10. Once again, thank you very much for joining us at the Singapore Pavilion, and I hope you will enjoy the exhibitions we have prepared for you.