

SPEECH BY MS EULEEN GOH, CHAIRMAN OF SIF
AT THE IVCO 2010 CONFERENCE
NETWORKING DINNER
AT THE POD, NATIONAL LIBRARY BUILDING, SINGAPORE
ON SUNDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2010, 6.30PM

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore,

Distinguished guests,

Delegates of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations 2010 conference,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Selamat Sejahtera; Vannakkam; Ge Wei Wan Shang Hao; and finally Good Evening.

I thought I would start off my speech with a little introduction to the four main languages of multi-cultural Singapore – Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and English respectively.

2. It gives me great pleasure to welcome everyone this evening to this networking dinner for our friends attending the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations 2010 conference, or IVCO for short.

3. The International FORUM on Development Service, otherwise known simply as FORUM, has been organising this annual conference - usually in partnership with one of its member organisations - since 2001.

4. The conference has come to represent an opportunity for IVCO members to come together and discuss issues-of-the-day that impact international volunteerism and development.

5. The conference this year is rather special for us at the Singapore International Foundation – for it marks a number of “firsts” for both our organisation and for Singapore. It is of course the first time that this annual conference is being held in Singapore. And for those of you, here for the first time, let me extend to you a warm welcome to Singapore. It is also the first time the Singapore International Foundation is co-organising IVCO; and the first time the conference is focusing on international volunteerism in Asia.

6. Asia as you know has slowly emerged as an economic force. With rising affluence, more Asians are travelling and choosing to volunteer domestically and internationally. This has resulted in a more vibrant and dynamic volunteer community in the region.

7. A number of international non-governmental organisations already have a presence in Asia, for example UK’s Volunteer Service Overseas and Australian Volunteers International. There are also Asian agencies like the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Korea International Cooperation Agency who are among the world’s largest in international volunteerism service. And of course there are organisations like us – the Singapore International Foundation -- small, but no less passionate about helping to uplift lives in overseas communities through the tireless efforts of its volunteers. Add to the mix, smaller non-governmental organisations who work domestically to improve the lives of the disadvantaged.

8. Despite the increased activity in international volunteerism in Asia, not much is known about the sector here. This is why, this year, FORUM and the SIF chose to focus on the **Asian** perspective on innovation and challenges in international volunteerism and development.

9. To delve deeper into the theme, we had also commissioned research on the “Emerging Perspectives on International Volunteerism in Asia” which uncovered many interesting findings that will be presented at the conference. During the course

of their work, researchers Ms Caroline Brassard, Ms Margaret Sherraden and Mr Benjamin Lough, found that just as how Asia is multi-cultural and multi-dimensional, the processes and approach to international volunteerism differ across Asian countries.

10. The painstakingly conducted research is also, as Ms Brassard discovered, one of the most in-depth studies devoted to international volunteerism in Asia.

11. In line with the scope of the research, the conference over the next few days will focus on similar issues. The two sub-themes of Climate Change and Youth Development will I hope receive intense scrutiny and evoke much debate and a lively exchange of ideas.

12. You can look forward to insightful presentations from volunteer-sending agencies such as Voluntary Service Overseas Bahagian from the Phillipines, and host agencies such as the People's Aid Co-ordinating Committee from Vietnam. We also have organisations such as Fredskorpset from Norway and AusAID from Australia, providing their perspectives on working in Asia.

13. The next three days hold great opportunities for us all to foster friendships and build meaningful working relationships that create greater impact in our development efforts.

14. After all, that is always what IVCO has been about – the bringing together of organisations from all over the world to create a supportive environment for mutual learning and sharing.

15. In this respect, I would also like to highlight the instrumental part FORUM has played in furthering the cause of international volunteerism by forming such a strong network of IVCOs.

16. In 2000, membership consisted primarily of European IVCOs. Over the past 10 years, organisations from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and even Asia have joined the fold.

17. I'm happy to say that a good number of Asian international volunteerism organisations are attending IVCO 2010 – about 46% of the total number. We hope that this will help raise awareness of FORUM in Asia, and result in a stronger showing of Asian IVCOs amongst FORUM's membership.

18. At the end of the day, having such a support system can only help us do more good work and create a well-connected global community of volunteers and development agencies.

19. This exchange of dialogue and ideas is what we, at the Singapore International Foundation, also seek to promote. We believe that mutual learning and sharing at a people-to-people level grow greater understanding between world communities, enabling us to build a better world.

20. That sharing begins tonight, so I won't delay you any further. Except to thank a few people. Firstly, to each and every one of you, for taking the time to attend this conference. I know many of you have travelled a long way to be here.

21. My thanks go out to our conference speakers for their commitment in preparing insightful and engaging presentations.

22. Special thanks also go out to our three keynote speakers:

- Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore;
- Ms Therese Mills, Assistant Director General, Community Partnerships and Latin American Branch, Sustainable Development and Partnerships Division, AusAID, Australia; and

- Ms Ashraf Patel, Co-Founder and Director, Pravah Learning Voyages.

23. We must not forget, of course our diligent researchers. Our sincere appreciation to you :

- Ms Assistant Professor Caroline Brassard, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore;
- Professor Margaret Sherraden, University of Missouri, St Louis; and
- Mr Ben Lough, Post-doctoral Research Associate, Center for Social Development, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University.

24. Let me also thank Ms Deborah Snelson, Chair, FORUM, its Executive Board members, and coordinator Ms Christina Jenkins for having worked so closely with us to ensure the success of this conference.

25. Finally, the SIF IVCO Organising Committee - for their leadership, heart and hard work that went into delivering this inaugural meeting in Singapore.

26. I wish you all a pleasant evening and a fruitful conference ahead. Thank you.