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**Speech**

**By**

**Abdullah Tarmugi**

**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI, ACTING  
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AT  
THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON URBANIZATION,  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE MEDIA ON  
FRIDAY, 8 APRIL 1994 AT 9.30 AM**

**Good Morning, ladies and gentlemen**

**Economic growth in many countries is usually accompanied by urban growth. Urban areas provide economic opportunities and hence attract more people to them. The concentration of people and economic activities, in turn, inevitably place great strains on the environment.**

**2 Urbanisation, if poorly managed, will lead to serious environmental and public health problems.**

**Traffic congestion, noise, air and water pollution are some of the problems many urban conurbations face today. In these cities, the promise of a better life is being choked away by a deteriorating living environment.**

**3** With an urban population density that is one of the highest in the world <sup>and</sup> within a limited land area, the challenges that Singapore faces in coping with rapid urbanisation are formidable. We are therefore indeed fortunate to have started our environmental protection programmes early. This has enabled us to avoid serious environmental degradation and to position ourselves for further growth.

**4** Today, Singaporeans enjoy a clean and healthy urban environment, amid a strong, growing economy. Our living environment has continued to improve. Our air and water quality is well within the international acceptable standards. Our people's life expectancy at birth has increased from 68 years in 1968 to 76 years today. Overall, our environmental quality is as good, if not better, than those in many advanced countries.

5        However, we cannot afford to slacken our efforts in maintaining our clean and healthy urban environment. With increasing affluence and a growing population, we need to continue our efforts to sustain this good quality environment. The quality of life that Singaporeans enjoy today is due *in no small measure* to our ability to achieve the twin objectives of a robust economy and a healthy environment. For this to go on, we must ensure that the government, the private sector and individuals work together and forge a partnership for sustainable development.

6        We have long recognised the importance of public education in the implementation of environmental policies and control strategies. National campaigns in the seventies, such as the Anti-Litter Campaign, have evolved into the Clean Rivers Campaign in the eighties and *then on to* the Clean and Green Week in the nineties. Programmes to educate school

children and the community on various aspects of environmental protection and conservation have been conducted.

7 In spite of these, bad social habits like littering still persist. Even strict enforcement and fines have not deterred littering. Stricter penalties, however, cannot be the solution in the long term. Our social habits and attitudes must change. Singaporeans must learn to take care of common property and to treat our shared environment as our own. Only then can there be long-term improvement. The private sector and, in particular, the media are crucial partners in bringing about this change in public attitudes and habits towards our shared environment.

8 Public education on the environment should be a continuing one and not just confined to campaign periods. Information and example are essential to help

individuals understand the roles they can play in environmental protection. The media therefore has a pivotal role in spreading the green message through greater media coverage of environmental events and issues. There are already a number of good TV documentaries on the environment and this should continue. In addition, good social habits and attitudes could be positively reinforced through radio and television programmes. With the help and commitment of our talented professionals in the media, I am sure significant results can be achieved.

9 The Singapore Green Plan has suggested that our major newspapers start a "Green Column" to act as an environmental forum for Singaporeans. The Green Column could have readers' contributions on the protection of our environment. As the business community is also an essential partner in the search for and implementation of solutions to environmental

problems, the media could help to highlight "green" companies which practise environmentally friendly modes of operations and carry out environmental auditing effectively. To encourage the practice of "green consumerism", the media could also help to publicise Green Label products and waste minimisation practices which individuals could undertake.

10 Your participation in today's seminar reinforces the commitment and importance of the media in promoting sustainable development, both locally and in the region. I am sure there will be good ideas exchanged at this seminar. I hope focus will also be brought to bear on how these ideas could be put into practice. I wish you all a fruitful and productive round of discussions.

On this note, it is now my pleasure to declare open the Seminar on Urbanization, Sustainable Development and the Media.