OPENING REMARKS BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE YOUTH ENVIRONMENT FORUM (AYEF) 2018 PLENARY SESSION ON SATURDAY, 30 JUNE 2018, 9.30 AM AT ORCHARD HOTEL

Your Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. I am happy to join you for the ASEAN Plus Three Youth Environment Forum (AYEF). It is heartening to see so many passionate youths from the region, gathered to discuss environmental stewardship. Over the next few days, you will have the opportunity to build friendships and learn from one another.

The need to protect our planet from environmental degradation and climate change has never been greater. The world faces an existential threat. Climate change has already brought about devastating effects such as droughts, floods, heat waves and the disruption of eco-systems, affecting lives and livelihoods. Rising sea levels will threaten the survival of low-lying islands and coastal cities around the world. It is imperative that all countries exercise leadership and take action against climate change. Failure to do so will have serious and irreversible consequences on people, economies and future generations.

Singapore designated 2018 as the Year of Climate Action to raise public awareness of our vulnerability to the effects of climate change and to rally everyone to reduce our carbon footprint for a sustainable future. Our Climate Action Plan sets out Singapore's adaptation and mitigation policies. We will expand the use of solar energy, intensify the 'greening' of our physical infrastructure and work towards a low carbon circular economy. We recently enacted the Carbon Pricing Act, which will take effect from 2019, to impose a tax on greenhouse gas emissions.

I am glad that many people have responded positively to the Year of Climate Action. Many organisations and schools have organised events and activities to raise awareness on climate action and what they can do to drive change. More than 230,000 individuals, schools and organisations have shown their support by pledging for climate action. I hope you will also be part of this Year of Climate Action by logging in to climateaction.sg *(pronounced as climate action dot sg)* to make your pledge.

Striving for sustainable development is an international effort. Countries need to come together to share good ideas and best practices on policies that will protect and enhance their natural environment and resources for future generations. Singapore supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and will be participating in the Voluntary National Review at the 2018 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July this year. This will be a valuable opportunity to engage in mutual learning with like-minded countries pursuing sustainable development.

On our part, Singapore is happy to share our experience with other countries. Under the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), we have trained 120,000 officials from over 170 developing countries in areas such as disaster management, education, health, water and human resources management.

ASEAN has also recognised the importance of working together. Many of you would have heard about ASEAN Cooperation on Environment. It is guided by the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, which has identified strategic priorities for ASEAN, including tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity, managing our water resources, and promoting environmentally sustainable cities and sustainable consumption and production. These are all critical areas in building a sustainable future for ASEAN.

As ASEAN Chair this year, Singapore will be hosting the Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action and meeting the ASEAN Plus Three and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Fiji and Poland in July. We hope these meetings will give added impetus for climate action in our region.

The AYEF is an excellent platform for our young people to work together to shape regional cooperation on the environment in the years ahead. During AYEF 2016, youths learnt to apply design thinking concepts to co-create new ideas for environmental projects. Many have gone on to spearhead initiatives back in their home country. For example, delegates from the Philippines have since started a 'Road to Greener Philippines' project to spread environmental awareness, through seminar workshops, youth environmental camps and upcycling activities. Delegates from Cambodia have also since conducted sharing sessions on waste management problems and solutions in ASEAN member states, and held an Eco-Enhance Training Session with like-minded peers on the design thinking approach.

In Singapore, our youths have stepped forward to organise community programmes to teach the public about climate action. For example, Nor Lastrina Binte Hamid[1], whose father was an underwater construction diver and helped her

[1] Eco Friend Award recipient (2017) and co-founder of Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA)

appreciate how changes in the environment affected people and wildlife, co-founded the Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA) interest group with three other friends. For her efforts, she was given the opportunity to deliver a speech at the Paris Climate Conference in 2015. Today, she and 20 other SYCA volunteers continue to be an inspiration for many. Another example is the 'Refuse Plastic' movement started by Clarissa Song, the youngest ever EcoFriend Awards recipient. The plight of marine animals choking on plastic waste led Clarissa to work with canteen vendors to stop the use of plastic straws and disposables. She also introduced classroom recycling corners and made the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle) an integral part of school life.

The next few days will be interesting and challenging for each of you. You will not only learn the theories and processes behind effective communication, but also apply behavioural insights to increase the effectiveness of your outreach. You will be able to see for yourself the various green projects when you participate in the field trip to Our Tampines Hub, an integrated community and lifestyle hub with environmental features such as a food waste digester and solar panels.

The world faces urgent and daunting environmental challenges due to climate change. We require bold leadership, international cooperation and innovative thinking to chart a future together. And ***you*** represent that future. I hope the Forum will enhance your understanding of current and emerging regional issues, and encourage collective action to protect our environment. Take heart from the theme of this year's Forum – imagine and create change for the greater good of the environment.

I wish all of you an enjoyable and fruitful Forum.

Thank you.