

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR JOHNNY TAN, NUSS PRESIDENT
AT THE NUSS DIALOGUE WITH
THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANPOWER
8 NOVEMBER 2011, 7PM, KENT RIDGE GUILD HOUSE**

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Minister of State for National Development and Manpower

Fellow NUSS Members

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening and a very warm welcome to the NUSS Dialogue with the **Minister of State for National Development and Manpower, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin.**

This dialogue is part of the **NUSS Intellectual Pursuit Dialogue Series** aimed at providing a neutral platform for distinguished speakers to share their insights into and stimulate discussion on topical issues of long term significance and relevance to Singapore and the region.

This evening, we are indeed privileged to have **Minister Tan** to discuss with us what it means to be Singaporeans, the external influences and domestic trends Singapore is experiencing, as well as the new social contract the PAP government has with the people of Singapore.

This is a closed-door session – i.e. no press is invited and only NUSS members and invited guests are permitted to attend. So please feel free to ask any questions, although I cannot guarantee that you will get all the answers.

Challenges facing Singapore

By any standard, Singapore has made remarkable progress and Singaporeans have done exceptionally well since our independence in 1965, much to the credit of our hard-working people and our efficient government.

For many years, our government has enjoyed a strong mandate from its people, and gained the trust and respect of most Singaporeans.

However, this sense of trust and respect seems to have eroded in recent years. The outcome of our last GE, and even the PE, was unprecedented. The results were very telling.

While there was never any real danger of the ruling party losing power in the last General Election, many would agree that a growing number of Singaporeans seemed to be unhappy with the government and wanted more say in how the country is run. The ground sentiment has clearly shifted.

So what has gone wrong with the ruling party? Is it that Singaporeans are getting too demanding, or is this just part of our political maturing process?

Whatever the answer may be, one positive outcome of the last GE is the Prime Minister's swift response to the election results by reshuffling his cabinet, promising to build a more inclusive and open society, and address many hot-button issues such as housing, immigration, the growing income gap as well as ministerial salaries.

That swift response has impressed many – both Singaporeans and foreigners – but it remains to be seen whether the ruling party can regain lost ground and regain the trust and respect of its people. I guess we can only find that out in 5 years' time.

Some argued that the PAP only responded well to poor election results, but I shall leave it to you to draw your own conclusion.

In the meantime, as we all know, Singapore is also facing many challenges globally. We are just a little red dot, have no natural resources and cannot live in isolation. Unless we are prepared

to accept less, we must always stay relevant and competitive, grow our economy and continue to create jobs for our people.

These are real challenges, and often trade-offs will have to be made by our people and the government in order for us to push ahead. The key question is: How much are we prepared to pay for growth?

Perhaps as Singaporeans, we should do some soul-searching and ask ourselves what kind of Singapore we want; what, if anything, makes us Singaporeans; and how can we deepen our sense of common purpose as we pursue our different interests?

Thank the Minister

This evening we are indeed privileged and honoured to have with us Minister Tan Chuan-Jin, who will share with us his thoughts on many of these issues and challenges, and perhaps also the motivations driving him to be a part of our nation's new political leadership. So let us together thank our Minister for spending time with us this evening.

Without further ado, I shall now invite our moderator for this evening's dialogue, Mr. Jeffrey Khoo, to introduce the Minister and commence the dialogue session.

Jeffrey, please.