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Your Excellency, Mr. TSANG Tak-sing, Secretary for Home Affairs, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you. I would like to firstly thank Secretary TSANG and the government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for organising this very meaningful Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum. Let me also express my gratitude for your warm hospitality since our arrival in Hong Kong yesterday. It is indeed heartening to see so many countries represented here. This ballroom will offer us tremendous networking opportunities that will help enhance our understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures. It will also add colours and diversity in the cultural relations between Asian countries, beyond our trade and foreign relations.

Let me first talk about the importance of arts and culture in community engagement. Culture and the arts play an important role in our society, enriching our lives and giving us our soul and character as a nation and as a people. As a multi-racial, multi-cultural, Singapore's cultural policies are underpinned by the belief that it is important for every community to celebrate its own culture, traditions and heritage and share our diversity in culture and traditions with other communities to further strengthen our national identity, sense of belonging and also the fabric of our society. While economic development will continue to be important to us as a nation, we cannot ignore the need to develop cultural vibrancy to help us achieve a healthy balance. In fact, the deep appreciation of our culture and heritage can help to foster more creative and innovative capabilities. Exposure of good artistic and cultural works, nurtures our aesthetic appreciation for the finer things in life, and also broadens our mind. The interactions and the inspirations that plays, works of art, books, etc., can greatly enhance an individual's ability to be reflective and also provides the benefits of discovery, stimulation and relaxation. Both active and passive experiences in arts enhances developments and expands our thoughts about our culture. So in short, art can make individuals more socially conscious and enrich our lives.

The arts and culture are natural social glue that keeps communities together. So

participating in cultural activities, whether visiting a museum, singing in a choir or joining a community club lion dancing group, can reinforce community connections, by generating pride in one's surrounding and the attachment to one's neighbours. Furthermore, understanding our own culture can help each community force stronger ties. As a community, appreciating other community's cultures can contribute to better cross-cultural understanding and also strengthen our sense of belonging to Singapore. Therefore, encouraging greater community access and participation in arts and culture can provide a valuable medium for different segments of the community and the society to interact and develop a sense of the community identity. This common bond leads to a development of our confidence as a people, first, and then eventually as a nation. Creating in the process a sense of greater self-assurance and the ability to withstand crises and also to take risks, and more importantly, to take pride in calling this place our home. Therefore, nurturing our culture is important for us to enrich our nation-building process and efforts. It is of no surprise that we are always on the lookout for creative ways to ensure that the public is involved and is provided with adequate opportunities to experience culture and share heritage trails in the community, public arts programs, and art works in public places, among others.

Now I would like to talk about the refocusing our efforts in community engagement. In Singapore much remains to be done in order to reap the benefits that participation in arts and culture can offer. The theme for this year's conference Arts in Living, Living in Arts is very apt, and I would like to share my thoughts on three strategies in our efforts to broaden our outreach in arts and culture in Singapore. So, these strategies are Arts for All, Arts in Living and Living in Arts.

So let me first talk about the first strategy Arts for All. It is important to change the perceptions that arts and culture is a luxury and the privilege of the elite, leading to some segments of the society not seeing its relevance to their life. For instance, the high cost of ticketed items and the high-brow position of arts events and artistic pursuits will lead to this perception. The arts and culture can be instrumental in improving our quality of life and an integral component of the society we live in needs to be established. The annual arts festival organised by my ministry statutory board, that is the National Arts Council, has broken new ground. This arts festival, I believe, has found the right equilibrium that successfully balanced the discerning art viewers and lovers, the purists, and also the general audience and the viewers, providing a program that is diverse, innovative and accessible to all. The resounding success of this year's festival with a record high attendance of 92.5%, the highest in two decades, speaks for itself. This demonstrates that art can be relevant to every

segment of the society, and yet at the same time fulfill Singapore's vision of becoming a Renaissance city of the arts. As for all, it's also about exploring and leveraging new engagement channels, such as the Online platform to reach out for the young tech-savvy Singaporeans. We have many initiatives and one of them is a cyber museum that will be launched by our National Heritage Board. The Cyber Museum will feature Singapore artefacts from the national collection, 3-dimensional photographs and artefacts as well as art works, will be uploaded and collected into a massive gallery to create the Cyber Museum. When it is launched, users will get to virtually curate their own exhibition. In addition, the National Heritage Board also has a web portal called yesterday.sg – 'sg' stands for Singapore, which encourages the public to contribute their thoughts of heritage, nostalgia and growing up in Singapore. And members of the public can also easily upload photos, blog posts of old Singapore and their childhood, thus becoming core creator of history. Using activities and happenings are produced in a YouTube like style, and these videos clips are placed on a multimedia platform called Heritage TV. So, these new engagement channels encourage a wide spectrum of Singapore citizens and people all over the world to come forward what to participate, and therefore creating a greater sense of community.

Now I would like to move on to the second strategy there is: the Arts in Living. Greater effort to incorporate mainstream cultural items into community events, networks and community centres could be adopted to bring art into our living spaces and our everyday life to stimulate demand for arts and cultural activities. Our vision is a culturally vibrant society that goes beyond the right infrastructure and into the heart of the community to nurture greater understanding and appreciation, and more importantly, to becoming an active participant in building up our shared heritage and cultural experiences. After all, it is our culture that provides us with an angle and also the ability to keep pace with the changes taking place around us. It is this culture which holds us together and makes us uniquely Singapore.

By changing the context in which culture is delivered the difference between cultural activities and everyday life is minimised, bringing arts together in our everyday living as something that is attainable. This could also apply to integrating arts and culture in future town planning and co-locating of arts and cultural groups at facilities and community spaces and the importance that place making plays for community engagement. Incorporating arts and culture in the community energises and adds life to public space, provides educational opportunities for the residents and arouses society's thinking and imagination. So this is an important strategy.

And finally I would like to come to the third strategy that is: Living in Arts. It is time to move beyond seeing community edges, new audiences and involve that incorporating content with cultural institutions. It is just not enough for the community to merely be appreciative to be a passive consumer of the arts and culture. Rather, a sophisticated community must be actively engaged as producers and enablers of the arts and culture to patronage, participation and philanthropy. Our National Arts Council has really made a start on this with its Arts for All initiative. The National Heritage Board has also been fairly successful in getting the community and the grassroots in partnering its efforts, in making heritage trails in the community and providing avenues for the community to add their personal touch. These efforts will be sustained and moved to the next level where communities take the lead in initiating such projects and sustaining them. So it has to be from the people, from the community. Avenues could also be created to systematically tap the experiences, the memories and the skills of specific communities and also provide platforms for them to share their wealth and others within the community.

So, in conclusion – successful global cities cannot just merely be an attractive economic market place. It has to offer more to attract talent as well as investment. Singapore's vision is a vibrant arts and culture scene which will not only enhance the quality of living for our residents, but will be a distinctive factor for Singapore's vision to be a global city for the arts and a good place to live, work and play. So in conclusion, we see arts and heritage not only as a good-to-have, but also a must-have that is integral to our lives and the community that we live in providing the cultural ballast that forged us a united and a rooted society. Thank you.