

Speech by Wong Lee Lin, Executive Director, Sembawang Shipyard, on the occasion of Green Wave Environmental Care Project for Schools' Award Presentation Ceremony, 22 January 2008

Mr. Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health, Mr. Goh Geok Ling, Chairman SembCorp Marine, Mr. K.K. Tan, Group President, SembCorp Marine, Mr. PK Ong, Managing Director, Sembawang Shipyard, Green Wave Advisory Board members, our Alliance partners, some of whom flew in from London especially for this event, customers, Green Wave judges, principals, teachers, members of the Press, students, colleagues and friends. A good morning to all.

Before I commence sharing some thoughts with you, I would like to thank our students for participating and getting involved in Green Wave which helps to promote and motivate students to think innovatively about sustainable practices for the improvement of our environment. In fact, I understand from the judges that the 278 projects submitted by the 1,000 students have shown improved quality and ideas. So long as our students can develop this keen interest and continued involvement in the care and protection of our environment, from hence forth, Green Wave is achieving its objective.

I would also like to thank our judges, you wonderful committed people from the Ministry of Education, Ministry for Environment, the National Environment Agency, Singapore Environment Council, National Parks Board, National University of Singapore, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Tan Kah Kee Foundation, Housing Development Board, Public Utilities Board, Singapore Science Centre, Senoko Power and various schools, who through your keen interest in the enhancement of our environment have shown such admirable willingness to sacrifice your time and efforts, huddled up for days in the shipyard scrutinizing, discussing and evaluating the projects. Thank you too for all your suggestions and ideas on how to improve our Green Wave programme. I thank the principals and teachers for encouraging this generation of young people to take a proactive interest and involvement in our environment, please continue to do that as you play a key role in the education of our students in environmental care and protection. Through your encouragement, we can be sure that we will see an even higher level of participation this year.

I thank our environment team with lead co-ordinators, Hui Ping and Gerald for their dedication in making the Green Wave a useful and interesting platform for the betterment of our environment. Thanks too to Shell International Trading and Shipping and BP Shipping for their support and involvement in this project. Dear Minister, we thank you for your time in being here. When you go around talking to the students and seeing their ideas and enthusiasm at work, you will realize that your 2 hours here are well spent.

Actually giving a speech on our environment in front of all the who's who in environmental protection and management is not only a humbling but also a frightening experience and I can only, as a citizen with a keen interest in environmental protection, share with you some observations and life experiences which I hope can convince our students to have a passion, learn, educate others and be actively involved in the care and protection of our environment and the planet that we live in.

As Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, our Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, rightfully said in this platform 2 years ago, there has to be a balance when we advocate environmental care and protection and the development of a country. However, we must ask ourselves whether currently, a balance has been achieved in our planet? If you read into the works of one of Britain's greatest living scientist, Dr. James Lovelock, also described as one of the most innovative and mischievous scientific minds of our time, you will be scared into either doing a super-human work for the environment or you will crawl into a hole and hide. He predicted a great catastrophe for the human race due to global warming, pollution and the excessive usage of resources. But we cannot, as citizens of planet earth, sit around and do nothing and let it happen. We must whether we are a student, a worker, manager or leader, act collectively or singularly to do our national service for our environment.

When I was in Hong Kong in November last year, the Air Pollution Standard Index (PSI) was at 140 to 150 every day in the city. Visibility was less than 8 kilometers for 30% of the year and cases of asthma and bronchial infections have soared in recent years. In fact, the air in Hong Kong contained 3 times more soot and pollutants than the air in New York and more than twice of that in London. My Hong Kong agent argued that Hong Kongers have one of the highest life expectancy in the world hence, they are OK but that is for now, will it be the same for their children and the grandchildren? I think not, if the pollution continues. Warner Brothers were filming the Batman Sequel at the same time when I was there....no, sorry to disappoint you but I was not recruited as an extra for the film. In one scene, Batman was to drop from a plane into the Hong Kong harbour but even Batman's body of steel was no match for the pollution in Hong Kong's harbour with waters that contained salmonella and tuberculosis, so the scene was scrapped. But, we do not have to look far, in our own beloved island; I do not think our people fully appreciate how pollution can harm our environment or how important it is to recycle our waste. I am sure that you have read the Sunday Times on last Sunday, 20 January, how our people indiscriminately threw all sorts of things and rubbish out of their windows and onto void decks. When talking to our Sembawang people about the subject, our Legal Counsel, who lives in a HDB apartment like most Singaporeans, told me that one day, whilst taking the lift to work, she found herself, cramped into the lift with an old refrigerator and an old microwave oven...so was someone moving out of the block, she thought. The next day and the day after, the 2 items were still in the lift...someone had dumped them but, in the lift. One of our

Commercial Managers confessed sheepishly that he threw his beer cans into the rubbish chute and they made a lot of noise...he did not recycle and he is a contributor of noise pollution so he is a candidate for environmental education. In contrast, during a recent visit to Melbourne Australia I was taken to see a building near the Docklands area, a 40-storey building, housing some 500 units of apartments. Instead of being shown the gorgeous view of the harbour, one of the first places which the manager of the building took me to see was how the building does its recycling. There was a huge area in the ground floor and there were large skips or bins marked for plastics, glass, paper and cardboard. They were very strict about the tenants throwing things down the rubbish chute, all "recycleable" materials must be thrown into the recycle bins and if they do not and they are caught on CCTV, they are given warnings. I was suitably impressed. Perhaps our HDB can look into this or perhaps our students can come up with another innovative way of promoting or enforcing mass recycling, bearing in mind that some 60% to 70% of our waste can be recycled instead of ending in landfills.

Our government is doing quite a number of initiatives for our environment including the latest on land transport, that is, in making public transport the preferred mode of travel thus reducing pollution besides providing greater transport service for our people. So don't just ask "what is the government going to do about the pollution etc?" What can we, as members of the public and in particular, our new generation, do to assist our country? The basic question is do you care enough for our environment to do your part on a sustained basis?

Some of the possible avenues for a change in our people's attitude from a "bo chap" i.e. for our foreign friends, bo chap means, a do not care attitude, to one that actively takes an interest in caring for our environment and actively participating in it, are education, the need for constant bombardment on the need for environment care and protection in the daily newspapers, and a combination of punitive actions and incentives. Personal habits and behaviours can be significant obstacles to sustainable activities especially if we perceive that there is a lot of hassle in participation in environmental care. Our newspapers can assist in publishing a regular column with articles written by environmentalists, scientists or citizens on educating and informing our people, for example, on the need for protecting our environment and how to go about caring for our environment, better usage of water and other resources. With time, it will influence people into greater action. Our shipyard is also considering setting up an inter-active portal on environment whereby good articles, ideas on environmental care, can be shared and a question and answer facility can be provided. So dear professors and teachers, more national service will be asked from you.

I see environmental education as one of the keys to change. One of our achievements is the education of our Shipyard's Ah Sohs. To our foreign friends, "Ah Soh" is not a rude reference to our end anatomy. I was told off once by someone in Shell that I was rude in calling the aunties who serves tea to our customers, 'Ah Sohs'. The 2, 60- year- old Ah Sohs are now doing recycling. So dear students, you can do your

part, help to educate your parents, your uncles and aunties, siblings or friends on doing recycling or conserving water or energy.

I read an article entitled “Encouraging sustainable recycling behaviour through financial incentives” A company called Recyclebank in USA identified the barriers of recycling and broke down these barriers at the local levels and managed to increase the participation level of several areas in Philadelphia, USA, from 20 % to 90% by providing bigger collection bins or carts as they identified that if space is an issue, that means if the bins provided are too small, the rubbish gets thrown onto the ground. Secondly, they provide a single stream recycling environment allowing all “recycleable” things to be placed together and thirdly they provided financial incentives like giving out rewards for movie tickets and supermarket vouchers. They have bins with a radio frequency identification tag (RFID) and each cart is weighed on the collection trucks and the RFID associates it with the household. The more the residents recycle, the more rewards they get. Maybe we can adopt it in Singapore. Maybe our students have better ideas on how to do promote recycling. Do think about it.

The point is, do we care enough to do something positive for our environment? I have news for you...we have no choice...otherwise we will make life harder to lead in the future for ourselves and our next generations. In other words, we have to care, we have to take a proactive interest, snap into action, do something constructive for our environment. Just devote 10 minutes each day to do your part either educating someone on environmental care, do recycling, save water, or curb pollution. Do this 10 minutes daily national service for our environment. It is easy to think that there is nothing you can do about climate change or pollution. But think of your action as a vote. If enough of us vote, that is, take action on doing something positive for our environment; the course of our future can be changed. Start by exercising your vote by changing things that are in your control starting from your own home. Resources, such as, electricity, gas and water flows through our homes daily. If each of us tighten up the use and limit the production of our rubbish and other waste, the drain on our environment can be slowed down.

Finally, it leaves me to congratulate all the winners. You have done yourselves, your family and your school proud by contributing your innovative ideas for the care and protection of our environment. Please carry this interest and active involvement throughout your life as we are depending on you, the new generation, to contribute in making our island and our planet a wonderful place to conserve and to live in.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.