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Opening Address by SMU President Professor Arnoud De Meyer at the Official Launch of the Institute for Societal Leadership and the Societal Leadership Summit 2016

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**Opening Address by
SMU President Professor Arnoud De Meyer
at the Official Launch of the Institute for Societal Leadership and
the Societal Leadership Summit 2016
Monday, 7 November 2016, 9.20am
Mochtar Riady Auditorium, Administration Building,
Singapore Management University**

Our Guest of Honour, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam,

ISL Chairman Mr Ratan Tata,

SMU Chairman Mr Ho Kwon Ping,

Your Excellencies, Board Members, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to have the opportunity to welcome you at SMU for the launch of the Institute for Societal Leadership and the Societal Leadership Summit 2016.

Indeed, creating societal impact has always been at the core of what SMU stands for. Let me cite a few examples.

SMU was the first local university to include community service as part of the curriculum – our undergraduates have to complete a minimum of 80 hours of community service before graduation, working on local and overseas projects. Many of them go over and beyond, and our graduating class of 2015 contributed an average of 145 hours. Collectively, our students have clocked over 2.3 million hours of community service since 2000, when SMU was established.

I always remind us that it is not the sheer volume of hours clocked that counts. More important is the learning for our students – learning that they can take initiatives that make a difference, learning that making a social contribution is not beyond their means, and hopefully learning for their life that they have a responsibility to play a role in society. This has now become an integral part of SMU's LifeLessons.

Second, our ground-breaking and unique SMU Master of Tri-Sector Collaboration programme under our School of Social Sciences brings together thought leadership and professionals from government, business, and civil society to master the burgeoning phenomenon of cross-sector partnerships. It conducts rigorous research and extensive convenings such as the Tri-Sector Forum to generate cutting-edge thinking and practices on collaborative governance. The 'wicked', complex problems faced by the world today cannot be solved by individual sectors or people who lack societal leadership understanding and skills. Governments are turning to business and civil sectors to help solve multi-disciplinary problems, while businesses are grappling to regulate themselves, to report and manage social and environmental impacts, and to create whole new business models to answer about sustainability. Our leaders in the society need interdisciplinary knowledge and tools to make such partnerships successful.

Third, the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, a partnership between the Lien Foundation and SMU, was formed 10 years ago to advance the thinking and capability of the social sector, anchored on developing innovations that address social issues. It has worked with SMU faculty and social impact organisations to launch several research reports on topics related to vulnerable communities in Singapore such as the elderly, people with disabilities, single-parent families and South Asian migrant workers. It has managed the process whereby Ashoka, a global non-profit organisation supporting leading social entrepreneurs, accredited SMU as Asia's first "Changemaker Campus". We join the ranks of Cornell and Brown University and 36 other institutions. This is recognition of our commitment to social

innovation in higher education. By the way, the Lien Centre will be holding its conference on social innovation and youth empowerment this Friday together with Ashoka.

Next, our Behavioural Sciences Institute, headed by Professor David Chan, has been conducting multi-disciplinary research, creating, disseminating and applying scientific knowledge about human behaviour in social, organisational and cultural settings, through conferences and publications. Professor Chan will be sharing his deep insights as a panelist speaking at one of the sessions today.

In addition, we have many more examples such as our Shirin Fozdar Programme chaired by Claire Chiang to champion issues on women in the community. We have also welcomed Former UN Under-Secretary General and social scientist Dr Noeleen Heyzer as an SMU Lee Kong Chian Fellow, to share women leadership and social issues expertise through lectures and a book that she is writing. Dr Heyzer is also a member of ISL's Advisory Board and she is here with us today.

I should pay particular attention to our Diversity and Inclusion team which has championed initiatives and developed support for the University to be more diverse and inclusive. This is a way to actually make a difference to society, and not only study or talk about it.

With the launch of the Institute for Societal Leadership (ISL), we take the next step in our journey of being a socially responsible university, advancing societal leadership and building thought leadership and practices that can help the future of our community, country and beyond.

Societal Leadership, as defined by the Institute, is “the practice of creating sustainable value and impact for the betterment of society, within one’s sphere of influence.”

It is a role not just for a small group of individuals but for all of us, however large or small our influence might be, collectively. The challenge is not the lack of opportunities to do good, but the lack of empathy and conviction, and not taking action.

We need more societal leaders in Southeast Asia and not less.

Societal challenges are becoming increasingly complex. We know that not one single entity can solve these challenges on our own. However, collectively, we can. We need a new approach to leadership that brings together stakeholders across sectors to address these issues and are willing at times to compromise individual interest for the betterment of societies and the larger common good. We need a distinct type of leaders who seek to navigate these difficult challenges, both in collaboration and conversations. We call it societal leadership.

The role we play as an academic institution is critical in advancing the understanding of societal leadership. By investing in research on the subject, curating lessons learnt from senior statesmen and women, understanding the attributes and traits of societal leaders, we as a university and by proxy, ISL, can codify these attributes and lessons, and impart it to the next generation.

If we can take this research and learning and educate our young, imagine the kind of world we will have when they start creating impact with the values we have inculcated in them.

More importantly, we can convene networks of societal leaders in the region who can call on one another in times of difficulties, both to seek clarification if they are geopolitical issues, or collaborate and share best practices to tackle societal issues together.

I had the privilege of having regular lunches with Mr S R Nathan, the late President of Singapore.

One of the laments during our lunch was the lack of deep relationships among regional leaders now, unlike in the past. Back then, many political leaders attended the same universities because the options were more limited. They knew each other from young, continued to build a network of friends, and were able to call on one another for strategic views and advice. Today, we have less of that.

I see a critical role of ISL in strengthening bonds amongst the leaders in the region, as much as we help to contribute to developing more future leaders. They may not be leaders in the political sphere, but they are societal leaders who aspire to make societies better. The responsibility is also not just on the future generation or students, but on all levels of society, and every single one of us.

I am pleased to see the growth of ISL from what was an idea, to what it is today. It is heartening to see in this room, the current societal leaders and emerging ones, who can share a common vision of a better future for us and more generations to come, and want to work towards it.

I am excited at what the future will bring. Societal Leadership remains as SMU's commitment to the region that we are a part of, and one that we are proud to serve.

I thank you for joining us today to witness the launch, and to be a part of this joint movement.

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