**CLOSING REMARKS BY MDM RAHAYU MAHZAM, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, AT THE 9TH SINGAPORE-BRUNEI YOUTH LEADERS EXCHANGE PROGRAMME CLOSING CEREMONY ON FRIDAY 31 MAY 2024, 3.25PM AT HOTEL JEN SINGAPORE TANGLIN**

Haji Zakaria Bin Haji Serudin, Permanent Secretary (Youth), Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam,

Mr Ahmad Nasri Abdul Latif, Acting High Commissioner, High Commission of Brunei Darussalam in Singapore,

Senior officials from Brunei Darussalam and Singapore,

Youth Delegates of the 9th Singapore-Brunei Youth Leaders Exchange Programme,

Programme alumni of SBYLEP – that’s what you call it, right?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good afternoon, and also to my Muslim friends, Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh. Firstly, let me congratulate you on your participation in and completion of this Singapore-Brunei Youth Leaders Exchange Programme that you have participated in. I can clearly see the camaraderie, the good relationships that you have built between each other, and I am sure that the past few days have been a rewarding experience for each of you. The friendships and connections you have made here during this programme will surely leave an impact and I hope, open up more opportunities for future engagements and collaborations, building on shared ideas which would naturally strengthen the relations of our two nations.

**Enduring Partnership and Friendship**

1. I’m sure, all of us will acknowledge that the world we know today is filled with political tensions, conflicts and unprecedented challenges. It is therefore more important than ever that we focus on building stronger connections among young leaders locally and internationally.
2. And one way that Singapore has been doing this is to encourage friendship and connections in our ASEAN region through our bilateral Youth Leaders Exchange Programmes which we have organised for our counterparts across the region, such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and most recently, we expanded the programme to China.
3. This is the ninth edition of the SBYLEP. I am heartened by the strong partnership between the National Youth Council (NYC) in Singapore and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei. This bilateral programme reflects the importance of youth collaboration and dialogues to tackle the multi-faceted challenges of our generation, your generation, and more importantly, it reflects Singapore and Brunei’s enduring friendship. I am also happy to welcome the delegation of senior officials from Brunei headed by the Permanent Secretary Haji Zakaria at the closing ceremony. I think their presence today underscores the importance of this warm people to people ties between our countries.

**The Importance of Volunteers**

1. Across the globe, many of our youths are at the forefront of making positive change to society. Some make their voices heard through policymaking and advocacy, while others choose to volunteer their time to social causes.
2. Volunteerism is an important platform in strengthening the social fabric of our society. Volunteers commit their time, energy, talent, and skills to serve the community, start ground up initiatives, or complement the various efforts of NGOs or social service organisations that support communities in need.
3. Over the last few days, you have embarked on a series of meaningful exchanges, experiential learning, and volunteering opportunities in Singapore.
   1. At MINDS, I saw that you engaged in art and craft and sporting activities with persons with intellectual disabilities. This allowed you to befriend them through meaningful activities, and at the same time understand more about the challenges and the strengths within this community.
   2. At Mandai, you learned how volunteers play a crucial role in preserving our environment by lending a voice to our precious wildlife through advocacy efforts.
   3. During the human library session, you listened to real life stories from individuals on embracing diversity as well as the positive impacts volunteers can bring through authentic human connections.
   4. At the panel discussion, you learnt how crucial it is to support and recognise volunteers and ensure their efforts create a lasting impact. I hope these highlight the enduring value and significance of volunteering, throughout all stages of life, beyond just youth. Nabil demonstrates this admirably – he participated in the inaugural run of SBYLEP in 2014, and has actively contributed to the community since then, and even now, as the Singapore Head of Delegation for the 9th SBYLEP. I had the privilege of having him as one of my volunteers in my constituency, so I can attest to his value to the community.
4. I hope these experiences have shown you the importance of volunteerism and its impact across diverse causes in society, and inspire you to give back to society in your own ways. I don’t think you need much encouragement, you’re already so rooted in your communities and I hope this just motivates you further. As for our fellow delegates who have been actively volunteering, I commend you to continue your dedication and selflessness, to continue to uplift our community.

**Celebrating Volunteers**

1. This year is actually a special year in Singapore because this year we have dedicated it to be the year of Celebrating Volunteers, recognising the contributions and good work of our volunteers in building a caring and inclusive society.
2. This year is also Youth Corps Singapore’s 10th – 10 years Anniversary and I understand that you visited The Red Box yesterday, and you met some of our Youth Corps volunteers and staff who are passionate and dedicated in championing youth volunteerism.
3. I would like to highlight two of our delegates, Alister and Amar, who have brought about tangible change through their volunteering efforts.
   1. Alister as you know has actively volunteered in Singapore and the region through more than 30 mission trips and community outreach programmes. His efforts in the humanitarian field, along with his advocacy for greater inclusivity, has led him to become an active contributor in the social service sector. He played a part in developing the Enabling Masterplan 2030, a series of national policies that seek to create a more inclusive environment for Persons with Disabilities in Singapore.
   2. Amar has also volunteered extensively with a wide range of organisations, such as the Sustainable Ocean Alliance and the Brunei Darussalam AIDS Council. She is a strong advocate for women empowerment, youth development, and environmental sustainability. Amar’s unwavering commitment to these causes have earned her the Youth Excellence Award at the 2023 ASEAN-India Summit, as well as the honour of being the oath reader at the 39th Brunei National Day. Her achievements inspire us to strive for excellence and make meaningful impact(s) in our communities.
4. There are many of you here who are like Amar and Alister each doing your part in your own spaces to create meaningful impact in your communities. I encourage you to continue in this journey; understanding the needs of the people around you, learn to adapt and work with the ecosystem and build your capabilities and strengths as you go along. As we progress towards building a more inclusive and diverse society, our youth must continue creating spaces and opportunities to transform your empathy and solidarity into tangible change. Your communities need you, the world needs people like you.

**Moving Forward: Doing Good Together**

1. While that might sound like a giant feat, remember that you don’t have to do it alone. There are many leaders from different sectors of society amongst us. The network you’ve gained through the programme is a valuable resource that I hope you will tap on when embarking on your next community project. Dream big, knowing that your community and peers are supporting you to make your mark and positively impact your society.
2. Before I end, I want to wish to share a bit of *pantun* to highlight our continued friendship and dedication to make our world a better place:

*Pergi hutan mencari kayu api,*

*Untuk dijual menyara keluarga,*

*Hormat-menghormati amalan terpuji,*

*Menjadi amalan sepanjang masa.*

*Padi menguning lahir kegembiraan,*

*Setelah semusim mengerah keringat,*

*Pentingnya kerjasama dalam kumpulan,*

*Kejayaan dicapai silaturrahim dierat.*

1. Thank you and have a great evening ahead!