

**SPEECH BY CE (NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL), MR DAVID CHUA,
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1 Good morning everyone. It's good to see all of you and I hope you had a good break, not just with the refreshments but actually just catching up with one another. It's been some time since we all met up and I'm very glad that we have this opportunity to consolidate, come face to face and discuss what matters to us.

2 I thank you for the opportunity to spend 5-10 minutes to share my thoughts on the bigger picture. I wanted us to have some time before going into the nitty-gritties of the conference and start talking about the things that we want to talk about, to just take a step back and take stock of what's been happening over the last few years, and to make sense of some things so that we know how to go forward in a more coordinated and structured way.

3 I have three thoughts to share with you, and the first one is that future-readying our people, especially the next generation of young Singaporeans, is going to get harder, and it's never been so needed as now as we begin to emerge from COVID. And I say this because we do track what's been happening with our young people, and we have a longitudinal study that we started in 2017 tracking 15–24 year-olds across the last few years.

4 We are at Wave 5 - that means it's in its 5th year. Within that study, we also track what COVID has done to impact their level of resilience. What you see here is a framework that was come up with by our lead researchers, so you won't find it in literature or anywhere, but it's a framework that guides the findings and the data collection. And we also try and link it to not just the personal agency and resilience, but how that impacts us as a society, and as a country. That's why you also see the link to national affiliation.

5 What we have found is that COVID-19 has brought down the resilience levels, largely because it has also impacted social capital, and social capital in the sense of personal social capital, bridging capital and the restriction of opportunities for people

to come together, to work things together, to forge networks, so that it shores up their resilience levels. So COVID-19 has affected social capital, which has in turn affected resilience.

6 Now, is it on the rebound? The answer is yes, the levels are showing an uptick, given that we are emerging from the restrictions of COVID-19. But there are challenges, and that's why it's going to get more challenging, because there are circumstantial drivers and forces that are at play and many of them have to do with how the future of work is panning out for the next generation, how people are adjusting to new norms at work and at play, and even in a social setting.

7 Cost of living driven by externalities, are impacting personal and family circumstances, and that again affects the resilience levels. Our immersion into the metaverse, into the digital universe will also shrink opportunities for bridging social capital, and that will again have some implications on your resilience levels. Outside of that, you see things like climate change and the wars happening. All these again will have a disruptive impact on personal circumstances, so it's not going to get easier.

8 We are thinking, and looking ahead, and predicting that these circumstantial drivers and stressors will create more complexity for our people. And so, future-readying is going to get difficult. But it means that we have an opportunity here to use our sector as a means to shore up the resilience levels of our people, especially our younger ones. So, it's not going to get easier, but it presents an opportunity. So, I just wanted to share this with you, that this is extremely important, even as a national outcome.

9 So, when we think about coming together as a sector, and uplifting the sector, it is not just also for ourselves - it is actually for the future of Singapore. And that's why we also draw that link to national affiliation - social resilience as a construct of how Singaporeans are able to come together. An interesting finding was that COVID-19 did lead to a rallying of people, but you still have the personal aspect and personal agency dimensions of resilience that we need to build up. So that's something that I put out there as a larger picture for all of us, in understanding where we're headed, and why we are headed this way.

10 The next thing is, we acknowledge that there were setbacks to our sector during COVID, whether it was through the restriction of opportunities, the labour forces and how our people pivoted from jobs to other kinds of jobs, and maybe are not coming back, or are considering how to come back. Then we had incidents that also affected the confidence levels of not just the customers, but even ourselves.

11 So, we have to confront these things. But we have got to seize the opportunity now, to take the initiative and uplift the sector. And so, the opportunity is now, not later, or in the future. And where do we want this opportunity to lead to? We want to make sure that we work together. So the Council is not going to work in isolation, and cannot do the work alone. It has to work with all partners and stakeholders, you, within the community.

12 And where do we want the sector to be? We want it to be solid, we want it to be safe, but we also want it to be sustainable. We want the sector to be confident about itself, about its ability to deliver solid programmes in a safe way, to know that we are making a difference and an impact on Singapore. So, the work is cut out for us. And that brings me to my last point, that we have to do it together. I need us to know that we can, notwithstanding all the challenges, we'll stick together and we're going to commit to a longer-term journey to make the sector solid, safe and sustainable.

13 So, this is the start, and it's going to be a rough journey, but I hope it is one that excites you, as it does me. I see plenty of opportunity, but I also see a higher purpose of where we're headed with this. So, I leave these three thoughts with you, about the challenges of how we see future-readying is going to be like. But now we have an opportunity to seize the moment, and time to then come together as a sector and put our minds to the kind of purpose and impact that we want to bring.

14 So, thank you very much for allowing me to share my thoughts, and on that note, I hope that we have a good conference where we can share ideas, we can forge collaborations and take the sector forward. So, it doesn't stop here or tomorrow, it continues post conference. And so we'll be seeing you around, and I hope that the energy and momentum will continue. Thank you very much.