

SPEECH BY LAURA HWANG ON THE OPENING NIGHT OF THE SCWO-SMU DEBATING TOURNAMENT, 25 FEBRUARY 2011

Ms Bernadette Toh, Director, Office of Student Life at SMU, **Julie Heckschler**, Deputy High Commissioner, Australian High Commission Singapore, esteemed guests, organizers, participants, supporters and friends, thank you all for being here today.

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the opening address at the inaugural SCWO-SMU Debating Tournament.

2011 is the Global Centenary, the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, an important milestone in the economic, political and social achievements and progress of women past, present and future. This year is also the UN International Year of Youth. Young people everywhere are a major human resource for development and positive social change. Their ideals, energy and vision make them effective agents of change.

SCWO recognises jointly these two important occasions by holding an inter-varsity debate tournament, where the youth of Singapore can deliberate on matters that are affecting women today. Indeed, debates are a means of encouraging critical thinking and personal expression, which are essential to the sustained progress of any society. By way of this debate tournament, which we hope will be an annual event, we wish to raise the awareness of women's issues among the next generation of thought leaders.

This inaugural Tournament would not have been possible without the invaluable input from many groups of individuals. First and foremost, I would like to thank all the participants and adjudicators for your enthusiasm and support for this tournament. We are sure to witness all intellectually stimulating discussions on the debate motions over the next few days!

I would also like to thank the Australian High Commission for all their contributions to this Tournament. Most notably, they have very kindly sponsored a pair of air tickets to Australia, as the prize for the individual who will come out tops in the Best Speaker category. SCWO will also be giving out trophies and cash prizes to the winning and runner-up teams. I am

certain that all the participants will put in their best efforts in the hopes of securing these attractive prizes!

Barely three months ago, this entire Tournament was nothing more than an idea. Over the last few months, a great deal of hard work went into turning that idea into the reality we are experiencing today. I would like to give special mention to all the organizers of this Debating Tournament, especially the SMU Debating Society and all the relevant interest groups from the Singapore Management University. Thank you to all of you for all the time, effort and commitment that went into making this event possible.

Last, but most definitely not the least, I would like to express my gratitude to all the volunteers who will be assisting in the smooth running of this Debating Tournament. It is heartening to see how so many of you have voluntarily taken the time from your busy schedules to play a part in this exciting new initiative.

And with that, ladies and gentlemen, I declare the SCWO-SMU Debating Tournament well and truly open! To all the participants, I wish you all the best. Thank you.