

*Our Guest of Honour, the Honourable Speaker of Parliament, Mdm Halimah Yacob, Parliamentarians, your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, our generous sponsors, members of SCWO, friends.*

The United Nation's theme for this year's International Women's Day is 'Make It Happen'. SCWO adopted our own dinner theme of 'Honouring the Past, Shaping the Future', as a special tribute and celebration of Singapore's Golden Jubilee Year. Today also sees the induction of 11 new names into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.

Needless to say, neither the theme nor date of today's event had been chosen with any expectation of the sad demise of Mr Lee Kuan Yew earlier this week. Yet, in a serendipitous way, both themes seem fitting in embodying qualities of the late Mr Lee's leadership and personality, and in underscoring his philosophy of delivering on a promise.

Singapore is presently in a state of national mourning and collectively trying to overcome our grief over the passing of such an iconic and influential leader.

That said, let us respectfully use this gathering today to pay a collective tribute on behalf of the women's movement in Singapore, to Mr Lee's accomplishments and contributions to Singapore.

There is a Latin phrase: '*Lector, Si Monumentum Requiris, Circumspice*', which is inscribed on the walls of St Paul's Cathedral making reference to its architect, Sir Christopher Wren. These words translate to mean 'Reader, if you seek his monument, look around you'. In the recent tributes, more than one journalist has used this quote in relation to Mr Lee Kuan Yew, if you seek his legacy, look around us.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew was a lawyer by training, but he was much more than that where Singapore was concerned. He was its architect, engineer, educator, thought-leader and founding father. He built a nation from nothing more than a fishing port through sheer grit and force of will. He also relied on the support of a strong and dedicated team of visionary leaders, and mentored a group of young leaders to build upon the foundation that he had laid down brick by brick.

It is therefore fitting that we gather together in the iconic colonial building of the Fullerton Hotel, nestled between Fullerton Square, where Mr Lee infamously made many of his rousing rally speeches, and Parliament House, where he is now lying in state.

3 characteristics run through both themes of International Women's Day, which well describe the accomplishments of Mr Lee Kuan Yew: **Imagination, Inspiration and Action**.

They also embody the hallmarks of a strong and sustainable women's movement. Each can stand independently, but together, they form an indomitable force.

When Singapore signed on to the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 20 years ago, it signalled a promise and commitment to women's right to equality. Since then, we have not stopped at just imagining better lives for women and girls, but have been inspired to incrementally make the changes

necessary to bring about real progress for women. A different world has unfolded from that which our grandmothers and mothers lived in.

Imagination, Inspiration and Action also fittingly describe the qualities represented by our Singapore Women's Hall of Fame honourees this evening, but I won't steal the thunder from the formal tribute to our inductees later.

One of Mr Lee's legacies is his commitment to racial and religious harmony. Again, and without any premonition, we departed from past practice and adopted a dress code of traditional ethnic wear for this dinner this year. This appropriately honours the rich and diverse heritage that is uniquely Singapore. Later, you will also be presented with a menu which delicately balances robust local flavours against a delectably modern presentation.

In many ways, Singapore's women's movement parallels Singapore's history as a melting pot of diverse ideas. Not always easy to achieve, but when done right, offering a good balance of diverse flavours, and yet a comforting sense of well-being and rightness.

It would be remiss of me as your nominal host, if I did not express our gratitude to our Guest of Honour Mdm Halimah Yacob for graciously keeping her commitment to us this evening despite her laden schedule during this period of mourning. When Mdm Halimah very kindly accepted our invitation to this event last year, I was pleased that although our patron and First Lady, Mrs Mary Tan, was unable to join us, we were nevertheless going to have the honour of our First Woman Speaker in attendance. We are humbled by your kind regard for us and thank you, Mdm Halimah, for truly counting SCWO as a friend.

All of us expected 2015 to be a momentous year for Singapore. We shall now remember it for yet another reason.

*'Reader, if you seek his monument, look around you'* – Indeed, it is often the intangible gifts that we leave behind like our work ethic, values, and determination that best represent our life.

Mr Lee may have passed on from this realm, but his spirit lives on in our hearts and minds in the legacy he has left for us.

We honour him best if we continue to **imagine**, **inspire** and **act** to "Make it Happen".

Malathi Das

President, SCWO