



**Welcome Address by Ms Junie Foo, President, SCWO
at the 10th Induction Ceremony @ The Fullerton Hotel
on 8 March 2024, 11 AM**

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam

SCWO Patron Ms Jane Ittogi

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the SCWO International Women's Day Celebration and the 10th Induction Ceremony of the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame. It is a privilege to stand before you today as we welcome 10 very distinguished women to the Hall of Fame.

We launched the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame 10 years ago, in 2014, with two key aims: To recognise and honour the achievements of women and their contributions to the shaping of Singapore, and to document and share their stories widely so as to inspire others, especially young girls, to dare to dream and to make those dreams come true.

My grandmother ran away from being a third wife in a peranakan family, those were the days way before Women's charter. She adopted a girl abandoned by her family at an orphanage; those were the days when daughters were abandoned. She walked an hour with the little girl, those were the days with no MRT and went to see the principal of Fairfield Methodist school and said, "I want to give my daughter an education. She wants to go to school to learn. "My mum did receive an education and the rest is history and I am here today, my mother's daughter. As Maya Angelou put it so well , each time a woman stands up for another woman, without knowing it, possibly without claiming it, she stands up for all women".

SCWO's dream, or goal, is gender equality. For the last 44 years we have, as the federation of women's organisations in Singapore, worked with our member organisations to make this dream a reality. Our call is for Equal Space, Equal Voice, Equal Worth.

The inequalities between the genders in Singapore have narrowed considerably, particularly in recent years. But violence against women still exists, especially sexual violence. And this is why we work for Equal Space – because women should feel safe wherever they are, free to live their lives as they choose without any danger of discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, and violence.

Another area where there is still a large gender gap is leadership. And so we call for Equal Voice – so that women will be equally represented in political, corporate, and community leadership. Policymaking will benefit from the perspectives they bring to the discussions and decisions.

Then there is the fact that, even as women have become a critical factor in the workforce, the bulk of caregiving continues to fall on them. This is work done by women that is, all too often, unvalued. And thus our call for Equal Worth – that women should be fully recognised and valued for their contributions to society, family, and the workplace, where there should be no gender wage gap for work of equal value.

To close the gender gap, we have to recognise the structural or systemic reasons for the inequalities, and then to steadily remove these obstacles that can prevent women from leading the lives they want and realising their full potential. Much of this work lies in the hands of the policymakers. The SCWO and its member organisations help by pointing to the obstacles and outlining the solutions we believe are needed.

Changing policies is one part of the process; the other is changing mindsets. And this is where the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame has

an important role to play. We are showing that women are as capable as men of amazing achievements and great contributions to society. We are particularly keen to get the stories of our Hall of Fame women to young children because the future is theirs to shape, and we want them to shape a society that is just and equal.

This is why we launched Project Awesome in 2021. We provided all schools in Singapore with copies of the book *Awesome Women of Singapore*, which is about the women in the Hall of Fame. We organise talks, exhibitions, and workshops at the schools to share with schoolchildren the stories of the Hall of Fame women.

We are delighted and very thankful that The Hour Glass recognises the importance of the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame and Project Awesome and has made a three-year commitment of funding support.

The \$1.2 million that The Hour Glass is providing will allow us to step up our Project Awesome activities and widen our range of avenues to reach young people and engage them with the inspiring stories of the Awesome women.

A first step was to launch late last year the annual Awesome Art Competition. The inaugural competition was for primary and secondary school students, who were asked to capture in their

artwork the spirit of the Awesome women. We were very impressed with the quality of the entries. You may have noticed earlier in the foyer the winning artworks.

The next step we are taking with Project Awesome is into the metaverse. The team is working on Dream Hero, an interactive game for young people on the Roblox platform. It's based on some of the Hall of Fame women. By playing the game, young people will not just get to know the stories of these women; they will also learn something about themselves.

Here's a sneak peak of what Dream Hero will look like. (pause to flash image on screen)

Speaking of heroes and dreams, a few years ago we submitted a proposal to the Government that the contributions of women to our nation be recognised by naming roads or gardens and other places after some of our most outstanding women.

We said in our proposal: "This visible and physically permanent acknowledgement of women's contributions would help to shift the societal mindset that men matter more than women, that it was just men who built and shaped Singapore, that women played and should continue to play a secondary role in society. Having roads and places

named after our outstanding women would be a powerful reminder, especially to young Singaporeans, of the pioneering role that women played in many aspects of life in Singapore.”

We proposed that an initial 10 roads or places be named after women, with more to be considered later, and we identified the 10 women in the Hall of Fame that we think should be the first to be honoured and remembered in this way.

That our heroes in the Singapore Women’s Hall of Fame be commemorated this way is more than just our dream. It is our firm belief that this is an important step for us to take as a nation if we are to achieve gender equality. We need to do more, a lot more, to show that women and men are equal, that as a society we are truly committed to Equal Space, Equal Voice, Equal Worth.

Finally, we are very excited to announce that we will hold SAGE, or the Summit on Action for Gender Equality, on 5th September this year. It will bring together policymakers, activists, and the many others who believe in the importance of gender equality and who are working for it. SAGE will set the stage for SCWO as we enter, next year, our 45th year of working for gender equality in Singapore.

After this brief glimpse of what lies ahead for us, I must bring us back to what this day is all about. And that is to honour ten more Awesome women. I am so glad that some of our inductees of the Hall of Fame are here today to help us welcome these ten women to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame. Prepare to be inspired by these awesome women!

To quote Maya Angelou - "Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it and possibly without claiming it, she stands up for all women. "

May we always remember and celebrate the different ways we are beautiful.

Thank you.