

**ADDRESS BY MS JANE ITTOGI, SCWO PATRON AT THE SCWO
CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024 AND
SINGAPORE WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME 10th INDUCTION
CEREMONY & LUNCHEON
ON 8 MARCH 2024 AT THE FULLERTON HOTEL**

Ms Junie Foo, President SCWO

Professor Tommy Koh, Chair of Singapore Women's Hall of Fame
Selection Panel

Distinguished Guests

Good morning

1. We stand inspired by the zeal and energy of the SCWO, and the many women's organisations in Singapore within your umbrella, in your **work for gender equality in Singapore for: equal space, equal voice, and equal worth.**
2. **Equal space, equal voice, equal worth.** Junie has just spoken eloquently and pointedly about each. And we all know there is more to be done to get there.
3. We know that getting there requires **actions.** The White Paper on Singapore Women's Development, which was unanimously endorsed by Parliament in 2022, outlined 25 action plans to be implemented over 10 years - through partnerships between government, community, employers and others.
4. But we also know that the success of these action plans requires a **culture shift.** A culture shift that enables us to break free of the norms and stereotypes that limit our choices: the choices of girls and women, and indeed of boys and men too.
5. The work of the SCWO and your members is helping bring about this culture shift: chipping away at the norms and stereotypes, and slowly but surely expanding women's ambitions.

6. The stories of the inspiring women who we honour in the **Singapore Women's Hall of Fame** tell every girl that paths exist, and new paths can be created, for women to play leading roles.

7. Of the ten women so honoured today, I will in the interests of time highlight what three of them brought to us - each of them pioneers at a time when the obstacles for women were much higher than they are today.
 - a. First, **Tan See Lai**: was always a step ahead of her times. She championed the use of **educational technology** in our schools, as one of the Education Ministry's pioneer TV producers in 1967. Before then, Ms Tan had, as many of us will remember, been our **first woman newscaster**, when television came to Singapore in the 1960s.

 - b. Second, **Sylvia Toh** got us to think, laugh and express ourselves in our own way. She was the first to document and celebrate '**Singlish**'. It helped us be comfortable in the skin of our own spoken rojak, **our real-life 'social media'** as it were. Ms Toh was also a leading humourist, and is still at it in her online columns.

 - c. Third, **Hadijah Rahmat**'s contributions were valuable in a different way. Her seminal research documented everyday **life on the ground**, specifically the social histories of our kampongs, for posterity. Kampongs had to make way as we developed, but it will do us well to remember the values and culture that went with kampong life, common to many of us at the time. Mdm Rahmat was also persuasive in getting - mother tongue language teachers - to learn the **culture and literature of other ethnic groups** - so important for our multi-cultural development.

8. Yet today, on **International Women's Day**, we are not only **honouring women who, despite the obstacles they faced, have created paths of their own. We are reflecting too on how paths can be opened to all, and by all, so that we can create what ultimately matters: a better society, and a more humane world.**

9. March 8th was chosen by the United Nations half a century ago as a day when we not only celebrate women's achievements, but also recognise that the full participation and equality of women - in social, economic and political life - is needed for **social progress and peace everywhere**. To which we must add, **humanity's ability to save the planet** we live in.
10. **International Women's Day therefore doesn't only celebrate how 'women hold up half the sky'. It points to a larger ambition, which must be to make better lives possible by clearing the storms from the sky** - the terrible wars, the violence within societies, the choked aspirations of too many, and the runaway climate change. **And that it requires, critically, the full participation of women, and the shift in values that women can bring through their leadership.**
11. We can take inspiration from Noeleen Heyzer, the highest-ranking Singaporean to date in the UN system, who dedicated her life to opening spaces for dialogue and change: to advance equity, social justice, and sustainable development for people and planet.
12. So it is not just for the sake of form that we want to see more women leaders in the corporate sector, in the community and in politics. It is the **shift in values** that women would bring to decision making that we hope will help us create good societies and a more cooperative and humane world.
13. The **values that International Women's Day** advocates help to chart the course. In particular:
- **Dignity and respect** for all, so that everyone is valued and diversity is appreciated.
 - **Empathy**, or putting ourselves in the slippers of others - even those across the world - and treating others as we ourselves wish to be treated.
 - **Justice**, so that every individual is treated fairly and ethically, at work, in the community and at home. And so that no winner takes all.

14. Imagine. Would the world be in such a sorry state if women were fully represented in decision-making?

- Would we have the awful wars that we see, within and between nations?
- The sexual violence against girls and women that remains at epidemic levels?
- The denial of a decent education and a future for hundreds of millions of children?
- The half-hearted efforts to avoid the looming catastrophies of the climate crisis?

15. Imagine: If women were fully represented in **decision making**. We remind ourselves today of what is possible. To start to act, even if it means something small, but to think big, take inspiration from the Hall of Fame honourees, share and propagate the values that take us outside our usual boundaries. And aim for greater heights of both personal and social achievement, among girls and boys, from every background.

16. Imagine: **the shift in values** if women were fully represented in decision making. And we remind ourselves of the words of Bridget Tan, who was inducted to the Hall of Fame in 2015 and who sadly left us a few years ago:

I quote:

“For me, social justice is the responsibility of each and every person.

The strong must help the weak; the rich must help the poor.

Those who are knowledgeable should help those who aren't.

We all have a part to play.” Unquote.

17. We can spread those values. Make them our culture.

Thank you.