

**PARTY CONFERENCE AND AWARDS 2022**  
**SPEECH BY DPM LAWRENCE WONG ON 6 NOVEMBER 2022**

Comrades Chairman and Secretary-General

Comrades and Friends

Brothers and Sisters of the NTUC

1. Good morning everyone. So good to see all of you in this room today!
  
2. I'm very happy that we can come together like this in person in such a large scale event, especially after nearly three years of COVID restrictions. And I'm so glad that more and more activities are resuming and returning to normal. Our Indian friends just had a very joyous Deepavali celebrations, so Iniya tīpāvaḷi vāḷttukka! (Happy Deepavali) to all of you!
  
3. I am sure everyone is looking forward to the year end festivities as well. Many probably already making your holiday plans. Meanwhile, of course, we have important work to do today. So let me start with a few words in Mandarin before I continue in English.

大家早上好，非常高兴能够在今天的党大会上，跟大家说几句话。

疫情爆发至今已经快三年了。

这段日子，我们齐心对抗冠病，经历不少考验。

我非常感谢各位党员在基层方面不辞劳苦的服务。

你们和居民保持联系，关心他们，照顾他们的日常需要。

我特别要发扬党内资深的党员。

你们为党，为人民，为国家忠心耿耿地服务了几十年，

你们与行动党风雨同舟，同甘共苦，熬过了建国初期的那段艰难的日子。

而过去几年，为了实现党支部领导班子的更新，你们从岗位退下来，让年轻的领导班子能够顺利接替重任。

更让人欣慰的是，你们依然愿意留在各自的支部服务，尽心尽力地引导年轻的党员。

在此，让我衷心感谢在座的每一位党员的忠诚服务和努力。谢谢大家。

我们必须传承资深党员们这股不屈不挠的精神，为下一阶段的工作做好准备。

我们正处于历史上一个关键的阶段。

随着大国在本区域的竞争日益剧烈，不仅世界局势动荡不安，全球经济展望更是越来越不明朗

在新加坡，我们的经济渐渐成熟，人口也逐渐老龄化，我们的需求也日益增加。

与此同时，我国政治上的竞争也越来越激烈。

新加坡人希望国会有更多不同的意见，对执政党提出有效的权力制衡。

我们将会面对更激烈的竞选挑战，而我们接下来必须付出更大的努力，才能赢得国人的信心与支持。

我深知自己在接棒之际，也必须面对眼前的各种挑战。

但是我有信心 -- 只要我们团结一致，无论面对什么挑战，也能一一克服

能够回馈党和效劳国家是我的荣幸。我也很荣幸能够得到大家的支持

我过去几个月也拜访了各个支部。很感谢大家的热列欢迎。

我也感谢大家热心的反馈和踊跃的提供意见。

这让我更深地了解你们的付出，和你们所面对的挑战。

我向大家保证，我一定竭尽所能，为你们、为党、为国家服务。

让我们一起加倍努力，赢得国人的信任，用我们的实际行动让国人领悟到人民行动党是唯一能带领新加坡前进的最佳政党。

让我们共同前进，一起迈向更好的未来。谢谢大家！

4. Comrades, since my colleagues chose me to lead the 4G team, I have gone round to visit our branches.

- a. I've heard your views, concerns and feedback
- b. And I thank all of you for your candid sharing and discussions
- c. For example, several Malay activists had encouraged me to speak more in Malay
- d. I've taken your suggestions on board and started doing so
- e. Sekarang, saya sedang kerja keras mempelajari Bahasa Melayu
- f. Saya akan bercakap lebih banyak dalam Bahasa Melayu pada masa yang akan datang

- g. Dengan cukup masa dan latihan, saya akan menjadi lebih baik
  - h. Terima kasih atas sokongan anda. Thank you!
5. Across all my branch visits, I've heard expressions of support from all of you.
- a. I'm humbled and honoured to have your support
  - b. For me, it's a great privilege to be able to serve, and to give back to our party and our country
  - c. I do not take the trust invested in me lightly
  - d. And I make this solemn commitment: I will give the full measure of my strength in service of my party, my people and my country
6. I've been a huge beneficiary of the Singapore story
- a. As a young boy growing up in Marine Parade, I've never had any grand ambitions
  - b. But I grew up with a strong sense of duty and service
7. Because my parents instilled in me the values of steadfast, honest and hard work

8. And that's because they had been through hard times in life
  - a. My father was a first-generation immigrant from China – he arrived in Ipoh as a young boy with practically nothing, and later came to Singapore to eke out a living
  - b. My mother's family lived in Kampong Amber
    - i. My late grandfather was Lee Sin Yew (I know the name sounds similar, but in case you are wondering, he's not related to LKY!)
    - ii. He barely survived the Japanese Occupation and he later struggled to make a living as a fisherman
    - iii. So my mum had to do odd jobs at just nine years of age to earn extra money for the family
9. My story is not unique. It's an everyday Singaporean story. I'm sure among you, many can relate to it. It's a story that echoes the upbringing and background of many Singaporeans
  - a. For the Singapore story is a story of all of us rising above adversity, aspiring towards a better life, and having the grit to make that happen

10. I remember once asking my mother what kampong life was like, and whether she had fun. And she replied: “there was no time for fun when I was growing up.”

- a. It was a sobering reply
- b. And I realised her matter-of-fact answer carried the weight of the hardship and sacrifices that she and many like her had to accept to carve out a living for themselves
- c. And I learnt early in life that the peace and stability that I and so many other Singaporeans enjoyed did not come without cost.

11. So let’s always remember what it took to get to where we are today. That history is a key part of who we are as Singaporeans

- a. I believe we are a people who are grateful for the simple things in life; grateful for what we have received
- b. At the same time, we do not just settle for less; we keep striving forward with a never-say-die spirit, determined to overcome tough odds and keep on doing better
- c. And we are a people who care for more than just our own needs. We want to do our part to help others and ensure the next generation can enjoy a better future.

12. This is the mental picture I have had of Singapore and Singaporeans throughout my life

- a. So when my colleagues chose me to lead the team, I agreed to step up; and I said I would do my best
- b. Because I know it's not just about me
- c. It's about the whole team working together – complementing one another with our diverse strengths.
- d. And all of you in the PAP – as well as the NTUC – all of you are part of this team
- e. So as I prepare for my new responsibilities, I have one thing to ask from all of you: please give me your wholehearted support, so we can build the strongest team to take Singapore forward.

13. During my visit to the branches, the two most popular questions I'm asked are: when will the next election be, and when will I be taking over as Prime Minister?

- a. We know the election must take place by 2025

- b. Whether it happens before or in 2025, we already know that it will be a tough battle
- c. So the real questions to ask are not when the succession or when the election will take place
- d. But how we can prepare ourselves to put up the strongest fight; how we can win the confidence and trust of Singaporeans; how we can secure a clear mandate
- e. And to do that, we must do well in both government and in politics.

14. Comrades, we are on the cusp of a new era in history

- a. Over the last three decades, we've become accustomed to a world of low inflation and low interest rates
- b. Now we're entering a sustained period of higher prices
- c. For the last three decades, we've become accustomed to a globalised world with a free flow of trade and investments
- d. Now, all that is set to shift, if not reverse

- e. Because we're seeing the emergence of a new Cold War between America and China
  - i. And it will be more dangerous than the first Cold War
  - ii. Because the two great powers are more economically integrated, and there's no easy or painless way to decouple their economies
  - iii. When one country seeks to enhance its security, it makes its rival more insecure. And this will create a downward spiral of distrust that will cause relations to deteriorate further
- f. And all these will only be worsened by the existential challenge of our time which is climate change
  - i. Already, we are seeing more extreme weather events all over the world
  - ii. And countries are also scrambling for the resources they need to meet their climate targets.

15. What I've described is not something abstract, distant or faraway. These are clear and present threats unfolding right before us, and they can very quickly impact all of our lives

- a. The bottom line is that we are entering a more dangerous world – one where conflict or war cannot be ruled out, even in our region; one where growth will be slower and it will be harder to create opportunities for our people
- b. And all this can widen the gulf between the rich and poor
- c. And add to the simmering resentment and everyday challenges of those who fear getting left behind

16. On top of this fraught external environment, we face our own domestic challenges too

- a. Our economy is maturing
- b. Our population is ageing
- c. And our needs are continuing to grow
- d. These are the challenges we face in Government
- e. And as Finance Minister, I grapple with them every day. Almost on a continuing basis, I get requests from ministries, agencies, from all my colleagues, for more resources, more funding, more manpower to do

more, but where do we get all these resources, where will they come from? So these are very real challenges.

17. And all of these challenges will ultimately affect social cohesion – we can see for ourselves what has happened in many other places, including so-called first-world parliaments

- a. When there are diminishing opportunities for progress, tensions between people of different races, religions, or places of birth are bound to flare up
- b. Political parties that seek short-term advantage will not hesitate to tap on these fears and frustrations
- c. They offer simplistic proposals to score political points and to get more support
- d. These proposals are often cleverly packaged to sound as attractive as possible
- e. But the remedies are really snake oil that will not solve any problem. Indeed, they just make things worse, and in the end it's the people who suffer

18. No country is immune to such forces tearing apart their social fabric, much less a young and tiny one like ours.

a. So if Singapore is to succeed in this new era, we cannot simply wish away these challenges

b. We must confront them head on and do so bravely and wisely

19. But we can draw confidence and strength from what we've been through these past three years

a. During this period, you have seen the 4G team in action – doing everything we can to protect lives, to help households and workers, to save businesses and jobs; indeed to help steer Singapore through this crisis of a generation

b. It has truly been a baptism of fire for me and my team

c. I am thankful for the good outcomes we have achieved

d. More than that, I am deeply grateful for our deepened reservoir of trust – for Singaporeans kept faith with the government and with one another, and together we have emerged stronger from this crisis

e. That's in stark contrast to almost every other advanced economy in the world, where the pandemic has further fractured their societies

20. So I say let's do everything we can now to maintain this precious solidarity and trust that we have in Singapore

a. Let's build consensus and hold the centre – by engaging and partnering our people in good faith, by promoting dialogue and compromise, and by expanding the common ground we share as Singaporeans.

21. And that's why my first priority after becoming Deputy Prime Minister was to launch the Forward Singapore exercise

a. We're into the fifth month of this exercise

b. We've already ramped up engagement efforts across different segments of society, and signalled some new policy shifts.

22. Some people have asked me – what would I like to see from this exercise?

23. **First**, I want to help Singaporeans of all backgrounds realise their full potential and share in our country's success

- a. The PAP has always strived to achieve this – by building a good education system, and by giving everyone a stake through public housing
- b. I believe there is still scope for us to do more – to ensure that children from more difficult circumstances have a good start in life
- c. And to broaden our conception of merit, by recognising and developing talents across diverse fields, and helping everyone advance through multiple stages of their lives.

24. **Second**, I'd like to strengthen assurances and protection for Singaporeans in a more uncertain and volatile world

- a. And this means tilting our policies further in favour of the less fortunate and vulnerable
- b. We want to do more to uplift lower-income families, and to help our seniors with their healthcare and retirement needs, especially those who had lower or less stable incomes during their working years.

25. **Third**, I'd like to see a stronger sense of solidarity and responsibility in our society

- a. So it's not just about the government doing more

- b. It's also about all of us coming together – everyone playing their part to achieve our shared goals
- c. Because that's how we strengthen our ethos of collective support, and build our democracy of deeds.

26. These are my hopes for Forward Singapore

- a. These hopes and ideals are embedded in the PAP's roots and DNA – to serve our nation and our people, and to build a fair and just society
- b. And we achieve these goals in partnership with others, to be a national movement
- c. And the most important partnership is our symbiotic relationship with the NTUC
- d. So the PAP will always stand in solidarity with the Labour Movement
- e. In fact, I acknowledge and thank our brothers and sisters from the Labour Movement who are here with us today
- f. We will continue to work closely with you to uplift our workers, and advance their well-being

27. As we press on in this Forward Singapore journey, I seek the continued support from all of you – our comrades, our brothers and sisters, to participate actively in the process, and encourage those around you to take a keen interest

- a. Whether we get it right or not, will make all the difference
- b. For it will not only determine policy outcomes, but also define the refreshed compact and texture of our society going forward.

28. At the same time, as a political party, we have to be clear-eyed, and confront our political challenges – and our political challengers – head-on.

- a. The PAP has governed Singapore since we attained self-government in 1959 – that’s more than 60 years
- b. Many have become accustomed to the PAP forming the government; they assume that the PAP will automatically continue to govern Singapore no matter who they vote for
- c. There is no such guarantee
- d. In fact after the last General Election, I had shared with our activists, many of you here, the findings of our election review

- e. I said then that a stronger desire for checks and balances, for diversity in Parliament, is here to stay. This means that the Opposition is here to stay
- f. We must recognise and respect Singaporeans' desire for this

29. The Worker's Party is now an established political force; they hold two GRCs and one SMC

- a. We have a Leader of the Opposition, with extra resources and even taxpayer-funded legislative assistants
- b. At the last election, the Worker's Party contested in six constituencies. They won three out of six.
- c. But if you add up their votes across all 6 constituencies, the WP won slightly more votes than the PAP overall
- d. What if the WP had contested more seats? Would the PAP still have won 61% of the votes nationwide? Would we still have returned to power?

30. This is why from day one after being designated the leader of the 4G team, I said that I do not assume the PAP will win the next GE, or that I will inevitably become the next Prime Minister.

31. Because every election from now on will be about which party forms the government

- a. While we will put up good candidates, and fight to win every seat, we have to be prepared that we will not win all of them
- b. And nor can we assume that we will form the next Government
- c. But I assure you: we will work doubly hard, triply hard, to regain the seats we have lost; and we will work, day in, day out to secure a strong mandate to govern.

32. So we must have this fighting spirit and go all out to earn the trust and support of Singaporeans

- a. This is the work, not just of those of us in Government, but also all our MPs and our activists on the ground
- b. I recognise and am thankful for the work that all of you are doing
- c. You have tirelessly championed the interests of diverse communities – from empowering women and promoting active ageing, to advancing our sustainability efforts

- d. I also know that our branches are progressively resuming your activities, especially with the easing of restrictions
- e. So let's keep up the good work. Let's step up our efforts to address the concerns of residents, to connect with them, and to consolidate our support on the ground

33. At the same time, we must continue to meet Singaporeans where they are

- a. More and more, Singaporeans, especially the young, are getting their news and views online

- b. The online platforms themselves are also evolving

- i. When I entered politics in 2011 – we were all on Facebook

- ii. In the 2015 election, we had Instagram

- iii. In the 2020 election, we had direct messaging with WhatsApp

- iv. By the next election – we will have TikTok, or who knows what else might emerge

- c. There are different generations on different platforms

- d. So we must have activists belonging to every generation, and we must be active across all platforms, to win the battle for hearts and minds everywhere.

34. We have been building up our online presence and capabilities, but this goes beyond party platforms

- a. Each and every one of us represents the Party – whether we are in our Party whites walking the ground, or engaging fellow Singaporeans through a screen.
- b. We must have the conviction to represent the PAP, stand up for our values, and explain our beliefs and policies.
- c. We must have the courage to correct misperceptions and untruths, and tell people what this Party and this Government have done, and what we will continue to do as long as we have their mandate.

35. Comrades, this is the work that lies ahead for all of us

- a. Make no mistake – it is crucial work that will determine the future of the party and the future of Singapore
- b. I have no doubt that the political contest ahead will intensify and will only get more challenging with time

- c. We have to brace and strengthen ourselves for tougher and more uncertain elections
- d. But I am also confident that, working together in solidarity, we will overcome the challenges and we will prevail
- e. We must show through our words and actions that the PAP is the only party with the ability and the determination to take Singapore forward
- f. We must win the confidence and trust of Singaporeans, and earn a strong mandate to govern

36. Comrades, we are all here today because of our deep convictions for the PAP and what the PAP stands for

- a. So let's walk this journey together, hand in hand
- b. Let's chart our new way forward together – to an ever more fair, ever more just, ever brighter Singapore for many more years to come.

37. Thank you very much.