

**SPEECH BY MR EDWIN TONG, MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH
AND SECOND MINISTER FOR LAW, AT THE LAUNCH OF “SEMBANG ILMU PLUS+” AT
THE CHAMBER, THE ARTS HOUSE, ON 18 JUNE 2022**

1. Good morning.
2. It is my pleasure to join you today for the launch of *Sembang Ilmu Plus+* at this venue of rich historical significance.
 - a. The Chamber is where earlier generations of Parliamentarians gathered to debate on policies, and shaped our nation’s development.
 - b. I am glad that our youth continue to be passionate about the development of Singapore, and remain invested in our future.

A United Society Through Arts and Culture

3. The topic of today’s session is “Art in/for Society – Youth Perspectives”.
4. This is a timely topic to discuss.
 - a. We have been largely successful in addressing the challenges that we faced at independence:
 - b. From housing, to education and healthcare.
 - c. But the challenges of today and tomorrow are quite different:
 - d. A more polarised world with many divides – primordial cleavages like race and religion have taken on new forms, while new contests have emerged with a more affluent, educated and aware society, operating in today’s digital age
 - e. With different stresses and pressures from trends such as social media.
 - f. These are challenges that we can overcome if we renew a strong social compact together,
 - g. And collectively strengthen our national identity, so that each and every one of us feels that Singapore is our home where we belong.
5. The arts can be a common denominator in these efforts. Art can appeal to all of us, whatever our differences in race, language, or background.
6. Yet each of us might have our individual perspectives on an artwork, all of which are equally valid.

- a. By sharing experiences in the arts, we can better understand each other, learn about one another's perspectives, and develop respect and acceptance of viewpoints even if they are different from our own.
7. No one has all the answers, which is why platforms like *Sembang Ilmu Plus+* are exceptionally important.
- a. *Sembang Ilmu Seminar (SIS)*, which means to chat, started out as a platform for Malay youths to discuss matters relating to arts, heritage and socio-cultural history of the Malay community.
 - b. *Sembang Ilmu Plus+* now aims to reach out to youths from various walks of life, regardless of ethnicity and background, over the next two years.
 - c. Our discussions need to be sufficiently contextualised to the needs and circumstances of Singapore and Singaporeans.
 - d. Being able to discuss issues, even sensitive ones, face-to-face, is key to keeping our society united and cohesive.

Empowering Our Youths to be Active Citizens

8. I am confident of our youths who will be our leaders for tomorrow.
- a. I was at the SEA Games a few weeks ago, and was inspired by the energy and ambition of our athletes, many of them in the prime of their youth.
 - b. I have also met many outstanding and passionate youths driving and partnering Government on various social causes, from the arts, religious communities, volunteers and entrepreneurs.
9. The question is: how do we bring our youths together, to harness their ideas and energies.
- a. Platforms like *Sembang Ilmu Plus+* allow youths to build civic capacity for constructive discourse.
 - b. You are able to discuss issues and topics close to your hearts, and rally your peers to have deeper conversations.
 - c. And we will realise that all of us have a stake in Singapore's future, and that we can play a role in shaping our society.
10. Today, we will be hearing from Ms Shaza Ishak, Dr Amin Farid, Dr Marc Nair, and Dr Wong Chee Meng.

- a. I believe all of them have interesting stories to share with us.
- b. Not just about their successes but also about the various challenges that I described earlier, which would have shaped their views on the arts, the society and the future.

Conclusion

11. Finally, I would like to commend the MHF for organising this platform to bring our youths together, across the different communities, so that they may learn from one another.
12. I would also like to thank Temasek Foundation for your support, and hope that there will be more organisations coming forward to support initiatives that bring communities together.
13. With this, I declare *Sembang Ilmu Plus+* officially launched, and I look forward to meaningful conversations and constructive ideas.
14. Thank you.