

**Speech by Singapore Red Cross Secretary General / CEO, Mr Benjamin
William at the Singapore Red Cross Humanitarian Conference 2023 at
Marina Bay Sands on 19 August 2023**

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Our esteemed friends from the SEA Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. Happy World Humanitarian Day! Today is World Humanitarian Day! On behalf of the Singapore Red Cross, I welcome you to the 8th Singapore Humanitarian Conference. We have rebranded it to the Singapore Humanitarian Conference, no longer the Singapore Red Cross Humanitarian Conference. In 2015, we launched this Conference with the aim of fostering dialogue and collaboration among various stakeholders, including humanitarian and non-humanitarian players. Our primary objective is to facilitate meaningful discussions on the major humanitarian trends and challenges facing us today. It is a forum to share experiences in tackling these challenges, as well as to exchange ideas and solutions on how to address some of the more pressing issues.

In the past seven editions of this conference, we have dealt with important humanitarian issues ranging from medical and health response in crisis situations, to migration, youth, and the impact of COVID-19 last year.

In today's conference, we will focus on an issue of critical importance and concern to all of us. In fact, the extreme weather around the world, in Europe, in America and the rest of the world. Even as we gather here, it is evident that this is an existential crisis that we cannot ignore. The record temperatures in many parts of the world, the record rainfalls and flooding, and almost a contradiction, droughts are a wake up call to all of us - we cannot afford to ignore the need to take action urgently to build climate resilience.

Therefore, this year, we felt it was fitting and timely for us to choose the theme 'Thriving Sustainable Humanitarian Action for Climate Resilience' for this year's conference, considering the growing importance of sustainable action across various sectors, in particular the humanitarian sector. In doing so, you may ask, "why thriving"? Often out of urgency and necessity, emergency humanitarian action is focused on meeting immediate needs without much thought on environmental sustainability or building climate resilience. It is our hope that this conference will highlight the need for humanitarian actors to focus on and prioritise environmentally sustainable solutions that contribute to climate resilience, rather than treat it as an afterthought.

And this makes even more sense when we consider the interweaving threads of natural disasters, man-made calamities, environmental degradation and climate change. Interweaving because no longer can we talk about these things separately. Many of the humanitarian crises going on around the world today are either caused by changes in weather patterns and/or severe climate changes. On top of this, negative impacts of other crises that are not directly climate-induced, are further exacerbated by these climate extremes. And in some instances, humanitarian crises themselves have had adverse effects on the environment - this is especially so in conflict regions. These disasters and crises transcend borders impacting communities, ecosystems, and livelihoods on a global scale.

Unfortunately for us in the humanitarian sector, they disproportionately heighten the vulnerability of already vulnerable or marginalised communities. Humanitarian actors must therefore pay greater attention to being a part of building climate resilience, especially amongst the vulnerable communities they serve.

But it is no easy task. Ensuring environmental sustainability and climate resilience requires communities to harness social and economic resources, and develop humanitarian actions that are tailored to not only meet the immediate needs, but also meet the needs of the future. Given that our mission is to save lives and alleviate suffering amid crises and disasters, it is crucial for humanitarian players to proactively integrate environmental considerations into their efforts. This ensures that our actions not only address immediate needs, but are also oriented towards long term solutions.

“Thriving” also connotes vibrant action and the extent and urgency of the task demands the need for such thriving humanitarian actions to not only be sustainable, but also to thrive. I believe this has two elements. First, it should encapsulate a vision of humanitarian efforts that extends beyond the mere provision of basic survival needs. We must strive to empower communities to not only be prepared for and withstand the challenges posed by climate change, but to flourish in the face of such adversity. We need greater investment in humanitarian innovation to deal with these crises. People spend billions of dollars killing each other. We cannot just be satisfied with doing things the same way, using basically the same methods and equipment, as we have been doing for decades. But humanitarian actors need to invest more time and resources to find new solutions - new methods, new devices, new equipment to better protect the environment, make use of renewable energy sources, maximise scarce resources, including water, and build resilient communities.

Which brings me to the second aspect. We need to tap on the power of humanity. Achieving all of what I had mentioned cannot be done alone by any humanitarian organisation, no matter how big, nor even by the governments alone. We need to build a strong coalition of humanitarian partners - the One Billion Coalition for Resilience - that goes beyond the normal humanitarian actors. This includes humanitarian organisations, the government authorities, corporations, as well as motivated individuals and groups, especially the young people and youth of today. Only then, can we hope to mobilise the resources and expertise to meet our environmental goal of building climate resilient communities.

Insights by Speakers: Inspiring Actions

We recognise that no single organisation, government or sector can tackle this immense challenge in isolation, our gathering here today reaffirms our shared responsibility of embracing collaboration, and harnessing our collective resources, knowledge, and expertise for the greater good. This conference is a microcosm of individuals and organisations committed to environmental sustainability.

Today, you will hear from a remarkable individual Mr Jack Sim, who started the World Toilet Organisation, and who has made the availability of proper sanitation universally his life goal. What an amazing journey he will share with you. I am sure you will find interesting stories about him.

We will also have an opportunity to share in the journey of Mr Ibnur Rashad who at the age of 16, when he started the Ground Up Innovation Lab for Development. His focus is on “bridging nature, technology and community, through design, education and invention”. He will share insights on how

individuals and non-profits have ramped up their efforts for sustainability and created innovative and sustainable solutions for social and environmental good.

We will also hear from Meredith our hosts, Marina Bay Sands, providing a corporate perspective of the role that MBS, and corporations, play in environmental sustainability. It emphasises that humanitarian actors will inspire action when they partner together.

We are indeed very privileged to have Minister Grace Fu who will share her perspective on the strategies Singapore can adopt to achieve sustainability goals and address the threat of climate change. Her dedication and the tireless efforts of her team at the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment, have been instrumental in Singapore, leading the charge for environmental stewardship.

Finally, we will hear of various initiatives around the globe by our Red Cross Red Crescent partners on dealing with environmental challenges and building climate resilient communities. Pakistan is struggling with the floods. Humanity needs to come together to deal with these challenges.

SRC's Response to Climate Change

As our own commitment to proactively respond to the challenges posed by climate change, the Singapore Red Cross became a signatory to the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations last year. This Charter, developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, serves as a platform for humanitarian organisations to collaborate and collectively address climate change and mitigate its impact on communities.

We are introducing the green nation pledge. By signing this Charter, the SRC has demonstrated its commitment to prioritising environmental and ecological concerns within our humanitarian agenda. It also reaffirms SRC's dedication to foster meaningful partnerships with local, national and international organisations, to drive collective action in response to the ongoing climate and environmental crisis.

Words of Appreciation

On behalf of the SRC, I would like to express our gratitude to Marina Bay Sands for their generosity in sponsoring this venue over the past three years. We appreciate Marina Bay Sands' unwavering support as a partner in advancing the cause of humanity with the SRC. Through their charitable mission, Marina Bay Sands continues to touch the hearts and minds of the people in Singapore and beyond, making a positive impact on those in need.

To all attendees, I wish you a fruitful conference ahead. May the discussions, presentations and interactions provide valuable insights and takeaways to deal with existential issues while driving meaningful change in your respective fields.

Thank you.