

**SPEECH BY MR BENJAMIN WILLIAM,
SECRETARY GENERAL / CEO, SINGAPORE RED CROSS
AT SINGAPORE HUMANITARIAN YOUTH SUMMIT 2017
AT REPUBLIC POLYTECHNIC ON 1 JULY 2017**

Mr Amrin Amin, Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health

Mr Yeo Li Pheow, Principal and CEO, Republic Polytechnic

Distinguished speakers and delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural Humanitarian Youth Summit. We are glad to have 200 youth delegates from 10 countries join us today. To our overseas delegates, welcome to Singapore!

I would like to thank Mr Amrin Amin, Parliamentary Secretary for Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health for joining us as our keynote speaker. I would also like to thank our esteemed speakers Mr Laurence Lien, Ms Eleanor Yap and Mr Ezekiel Simperingham for offering to share their insight and perspectives on a series of topics that are most relevant in today's environment.

We live in very trying and challenging times. The humanitarian challenges we face today are immense. From economic uncertainty resulting in unemployment and retrenchment; to climate change, resulting in natural disasters and calamities. Globally, with global warming and climate change, we are faced with an increase in the number and severity of natural disasters. There are many ongoing conflicts, destroying lives and livelihoods, resulting in incessant misery. Almost daily, we are reminded of the threat of terrorism and the death and injury that brings. Even at home in Singapore, the threat of radicalisation and terrorism no longer seems remote. In the last

few weeks, a pre-school teacher and two auxiliary policemen have been detained for radicalism. We cannot be complacent and think that terrorism is not our problem.

Nobody can tackle these challenges alone - not immediately, and not in the foreseeable future. Whether globally or as a nation, in order to tackle the challenges facing us, we need to come together and build a coalition transcending race, language or religion. This is critical to effectively and sustainably address challenges and concerns. This is the reason the Singapore Red Cross is onboard the *One Billion Coalition for Resilience* - a transformative initiative by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to mobilise our collective networks, and coordinate our shared resources, and work towards a world where people are safer, healthier and can thrive, even in the face of adversity.

This coalition must transcend age groups and I strongly believe that the youth play a very important, if not critical, role in this coalition. When you combine your exuberance and a zest for life, with the passion for humanitarian causes, you are able to release immense energy, dynamism and creativity. You challenge norms, think out of the box and bring with you a fresh perspective. This is what is needed to break through the seemingly immovable mental blocks, and “sacred cows”, and find solutions for the inscrutable challenges facing us.

There is one more reason why mobilising young people is so important. In today’s increasingly divided world, we need to bring young people together, help them to understand each other, and form bonds the multiplicity of groups, like race, language, class or religion, which otherwise has the potential to divide and release animosity in the society.

It is with our belief that you, as future humanitarian leaders and pillars of society, will look beyond yourselves, and be the driving force - to drive social cohesion, find and implement sustainable humanitarian action, promote partnerships, and galvanise support for the most vulnerable. The Red Cross Movement provides a ‘melting pot’ and a platform for you to embark on a course of humanitarian action that you hold close to your heart.

We decided to launch this nationwide humanitarian youth Summit to catalyse and nurture the ideals and ideas of young humanitarians. I must commend the organising team, led by youth leaders Zaidi and Mathilda, for doing an excellent job in organising today's Summit. In defining the themes, namely elderly inclusion, voluntary and non-remunerated blood donation, migration, and community cohesion and security, they have designed the Summit to facilitate a better understanding of current humanitarian issues and trends, as well as, encourage peer-to-peer sharing of experiences and best practices across the Asia Pacific region. The team is looking to rally the participants to a commitment to joint action plan and work towards strengthening existing youth networks.

I said earlier that building coalitions and partnerships are critical. One manifestation of this and of us reaching out to organisations to work with young people, is this extraordinary partnership with Republic Polytechnic. Later, we will ink an MOU, that will lead to collaboration in many areas, including overseas missions, internships, blood donation advocacy, social enterprise initiatives and humanitarian outreach. It is a mutually beneficial collaboration that exposes students to the world of humanitarian work, and involves them in creating solutions to serve humanity and save lives, through an authentic and potentially transformational learning experience. You will hear more about this later, through a sharing by RP alumni Kane and Rachel. You will also see the students' works at an exhibition during the reception later. It is my hope that beyond the joint projects, the students take home impressions and lessons that last a lifetime.

I would like to thank Mr Yeo Li Pheow and his team at Republic Polytechnic for working closely with us to advance our humanitarian mission, and for generously hosting the Summit at this beautiful facility.

Lastly, I hope our youth delegates from Singapore and abroad will gain useful insights that will intrigue and inspire you to champion causes that you are passionate about. Together, we can build a world of empowered, socially cohesive and resilient communities.

Enjoy the Summit!