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**SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS GEORGE YEO
AT THE LAUNCH OF CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL
SINGAPORE ON 2 OCTOBER 2009 AT 10.40 AM**

1 I am delighted to join all of you this morning for the launch of CI's office in Singapore. I hope it will become a partnership between the people of Singapore and CI in promoting a culture of man living as part of nature in Southeast Asia.

2 Less than two years ago, Enki asked if I could explain Singapore to Peter Seligmann as CI was looking for a regional outreach hub. I thought the best way was to show Peter what we were trying to do here. One early morning, we took the tree-top walk at MacRitchie Reservoir. Along the way, a tortoise crossed our path. The park ranger picked it up and pointed to a tick attached on the underside of its tail, assuring us that that tick was not interested in human beings, only tortoises. He then put the tortoise back down gently with the tick still attached, both to continue their journey.

3 It was a pleasant outing which ended with breakfast at the forest station. A giant monitor lizard lurked nearby as curious about us as we were about him. I then arranged for Peter to visit the Botanic Gardens.

4 A few decades ago, we were not as enamoured of the natural environment. Then, the priority was economic development and that often meant a mastery of nature. Happily, MM Lee Kuan Yew was always concerned that Singapore should be green and made sure that everywhere we planted trees and shrubs. We became a 'garden city'. As our parks grew and were linked up, from a 'garden city' we became a 'city in the park'. In the last ten years, we have become much more conscious of our natural vegetation and the importance of biodiversity on land, along the coastlines in the water and up in the air. Looking ahead, I think we will become a 'city in the rain forest'.

5 What is happening here, we hope will eventually spread throughout the region. For this to come about, we must have economic development and knowledge. It is difficult to give priority to environmental protection when people are still struggling to put food on the table and send their children to school. With the entire region now taking off economically, the time is now right to see and promote development in a balanced way. Naturally Singapore becomes a little experiment for others to study and

draw positive and negative lessons from. Environmental organizations like CI play an important role in seeding ideas and establishing working models which can be replicated. CI's work, such as the Natuna project, its support of the Coral Triangle Initiative and its brokering of a Debt for Nature Swap in Indonesia, is already having a very positive influence.

6 But much more needs to be done. This is a struggle between man and nature which should not be resolved by man conquering nature only to harm himself, which indeed is already the case in many parts of Southeast Asia, or by nature conquering man like what we see in the ruins of Angkor Wat and Chichen Itza. Instead, it should lead to man living in harmony with nature, man living as part of nature. The wealth and knowledge which development brings should create a culture which makes such harmony possible.

7 Creating this harmony is a creative process. We need clever ideas based on good science and good economics. If protecting nature is at the expense of development, there can be no harmony. We must have entrepreneurship which is able to take into account both economic development and the larger social good. We need well thought-out regulatory frameworks which align public and private interests. Corruption is a problem that has to be combated. We also need entrepreneurs with a

public conscience because laws and regulations alone can never cover all situations.

8 Without entrepreneurship in the public, private and people sectors, we cannot achieve our goals. CI has particular strength in this area, enjoying the support of many very well-known entrepreneurs. It is also a deliberate move to launch the Singapore Office during the Global Social Innovators Forum. CI's partnership with the Social Innovation Park, the National Zoo, NUS, the Science Center, NParks and the EDB will help the Singapore Office launch off quickly.

9 I feel very excited to be part of this launch with Peter Seligmann, Rob Walton, Enki Tan, Penny Low, all the partners and all of you here. This year we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the *Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. The co-discoverer of natural selection, Alfred Russel Wallace, drew much of his inspiration from studying Southeast Asia. Singapore was his base and it is right that Singapore should now be the base to protect and make more abundant that precious legacy.

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