

Speech by Mr Tan Kok Yam, Deputy Secretary, Smart Nation and Digital Government, at Singapore Geospatial Week+ 2020 Launch

To be delivered on Wednesday, 9 September 2020, 1030am

Friends, colleagues, fellow participants,

1. I am honoured to be here today to speak to all of you. I should first start by acknowledging the strange circumstances that we are meeting. Dispersed geographically, but unified by a common interest to promote geospatial tech. This is the sign of our times.
2. Still, everything happens somewhere. Even if you are logging in virtually to a meeting, you are at some location, probably home, your device is connected by communication and computing facilities that are somewhere. It is powered from a switch box, by a power station, that are all at some place.
3. Because location binds all our activities, an understanding of the spatial and temporal aspects of these activities is key to gaining the awareness and insights to predict situations, respond to problems and address challenges. Geospatial technology and its intelligent application are very much part of what makes a city, a nation, Smart.

4. And not just our activities, but even the activities of viruses. COVID-19 virus spreads from a source over space and time, and its transmission and impact on society is linked to proximity between people. Therefore, geospatial technology and approaches can help us respond to the pandemic more effectively; dashboards have sprouted, not just in Singapore I am sure, to enable the authorities to track what is going on. Many-a-times, a combination of geospatial and other forms of data is required. I understand that in the US, Social Vulnerability Index and population data are being combined to good effect, with hospital locations to predict which communities need more hospital beds and healthcare workers.

5. But it is not just information for the authorities and planners. Geospatial platforms are also being used to keep the citizenry informed. Singapore's open data sharing platform, OneMap, provides citizens with COVID-19 related community information and services, such as mask collection points. Agencies like National Parks and the Urban Redevelopment Authority use a geospatial platform to share crowd data with residents, so that when we lifted our circuit breaker, people knew where to go to avoid crowds. Globally, various countries have created situational awareness dashboards to report different COVID-19 conditions, from food distribution to foot

traffic. In Korea, a platform can tell you where an infected case might have had visited.

6. I believe that the problems we are tackling are similar enough for us to share our mutual experiences, even if the policies and approaches we take to respond to the crisis may differ. After all, at a biological level, it is the same virus. We are also similarly facing social and economic fallout arising from lockdowns, circuit breakers, and general public health caution. So I think there is much that this community can learn from one another, and we cannot find a time to do so more urgently than this.

7. But even as we deal with the crisis at hand, we should also look forward, to emerge from this stronger and more ready for future challenges. Building for a sustainable future is one such challenge. In a way, this is different from dealing with a pandemic, but similar in that the challenge is global in nature, it requires a global response, and there is much to collaborate and learn from one another.

8. Here again, geospatial technology can play a decisive role. Practical ways to use geospatial tech in the space of sustainability abound. A simple example is the use of satellite imagery to detect extent of wastewater leakage and overlaying it with demographic data to assess where is the

affected population; or using telco data to locate people and supplement sparsely available population data. Locally, we are combining geospatial information from the transport and energy domains to work out how best to adapt power infrastructure to support pervasive vehicular electrification, for cleaner air and lower carbon.

9. Finally, like everything else we do in our Smart Nation effort, in geospatial tech, we see partnership with the industry as a key component. To this end, the Singapore Land Authority has formed GeoWorks, a centre to promote business growth, drive innovation, and connect people. GeoWorks runs workshops and training, and organises geo-challenges to spur innovations, for example, a challenge on Supply Chain Management done with the Singapore Logistics Association as partner. GeoWorks also catalyses collaboration. For example, the recently-launched 3D Singapore Sandbox at GeoWorks helps public agencies and businesses co-drive experimentation in 3D geospatial data experimentation, bringing government data together with solutions from industry members. I believe a lot more can be done together with industry, even as new techniques and approaches are being advanced.

10. Indeed, partnership is key. At this time of closed borders and constrained travel, Singapore as a small country must

remain open for ideas and for business. Globally, as I said, there is no more urgent time to seek out collaborations and exchange ideas and experience to deal with common problems we all face. The next few days will be an opportunity for us to do so. With this, I am pleased to announce the launch of Singapore Geospatial Week+ 2020.