

Message by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education

LIGHT ON A HILL: THE STORY OF ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE 1968 - 2018

ISEAS was set up in 1968, shortly after Singapore gained independence. As a small island state in Southeast Asia, it was crucial for us to gain a deeper understanding of our region, and use that knowledge to inform our interactions with the region.

In a time where insights on Southeast Asia were predominantly driven by Western perspectives, ISEAS was the first research centre dedicated to the study of the region by scholars from the region, situated within the region. By applying a local lens to its research, ISEAS provides insights on various pressing developments and challenges in Southeast Asia that were especially important to Singapore.

Hence, from the beginning, the orientation of ISEAS has been to produce research of exemplary quality that was valued by government and academics alike. This was long before the current push for our institutions to engage in research with greater relevance to Singapore and potential practical impact.

For the Institute to continue to serve its role, its researchers must understand the nexus between contemporary events and the history, culture, and social and political realities of the countries in the region. They need to come from diverse background, from academics to diplomats, public officers and industry leaders. There must be sufficient efforts to synergise their expertise and knowledge. Their work supports policy and decision makers, and better informs the larger community of scholars,

businesses, students and other members of the public with an interest in the region. They must withstand the most rigorous academic reviews, just as it must endure the test of relevance of real life developments that will affect the lives of millions.

As Asia continues to propel ahead and geopolitical landscape further evolves, Southeast Asia needs to have a profound sense of place in the world. ASEAN plays a crucial role in facilitating international co-operational and global stability. ISEAS has ground breaking work to do.

ISEAS today stands as an enduring legacy of the vision of Dr Goh Keng Swee, who had conceptualised, and pushed for its establishment. The Institute hosts eminent academics and researchers to develop deep knowledge and understanding of Southeast Asia. On 12 August 2015, ISEAS was officially renamed ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute as a tribute to Mr Yusof Ishak, Singapore's first President. As one of Singapore's pioneering leaders, his contributions, together with those of our other pioneers, were critical to the success of our fledging nation state. Affixing his name to the Institute thus also reflects the important role that ISEAS continues to play in the development of our nation.

As the Institute celebrates its golden jubilee, I wish ISEAS all the best, as it carries on with its excellent work in helping us understand the many complexities and intricacies within the region, as it has done over the last five decades.

My heartiest congratulations to ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute on commemorating this remarkable milestone and its achievements over the last 50 years.