

**OPENING SPEECH FOR
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGING URBAN CULTURAL
HERITAGE (MUCH) 2018
BY
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BAYVIEW HOTEL GEORGETOWN PENANG**

(VIP salutations)
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning, *Selamat Datang*, and welcome to George Town, Penang.

We are delighted to have your presence at the International Conference on Managing Urban Cultural Heritage 2018.

Cultural heritage has always been an important element of George Town and Penang as a whole. We have inherited traditions, living expressions, buildings, monuments, and collections of objects from our ancestors, which have over time given us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. In Penang, we treasure these cultural heritage elements, and the Penang State Government, together with its people, has worked hard to safe keep our cultural heritage to be passed on to our children.

In George Town, we celebrate our diversity by acknowledging and respecting the coexistence of linguistic, religious, ethnic, social, economic, and political differences. Our communities, many of whom are here with us today, have a strong sense of identity and responsibility to this city that we love so much. It is through such strong commitment from everyone that George Town continues to be the regional hub in the creating, maintaining and transmitting of cultural heritage.

Through heritage, we have obtained values admired by other nations, values such as the harmonious coexistence of different races, mutual respect among the different religious faiths and the perseverance in safeguarding our cultural heritage. With that being said, Penang is proudly introduced to the international arena through heritage.

The unique qualities of the historic buildings, townscape and multicultural living heritage in George Town have led to its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site together with Melaka in 2008. With this year being the 10th Anniversary of the inscription, a series of programmes were held by George Town World Heritage Incorporated throughout the year to mark this significant milestone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

About a month ago, I launched Penang 2030, an action plan that focuses on improving liveability, the economy, civil participation, and balanced development to achieve a family-focused green and smart state to inspire the nation. Along this direction, we will continue safeguard our cultural heritage, be it tangible or intangible, movable or immovable.

In fact, safeguarding efforts have long begun since *Pakatan Harapan* (previously known as *Pakatan Rakyat*) took over the Penang State Government in 2008. We have been organising the annual George Town Heritage Celebrations in July with active participation from the local communities to showcase our culture and traditions. This year's Celebrations has attracted over 15,000 celebration-goers. We also have the annual George Town Festival on arts and culture, and it has gained much international recognition.

As part of our conservation efforts, the Penang State Government has allocated a total of RM3 million in seed funding for the Heritage Habitat Seed Fund, which will be launched in November this year. We hope that through this programme, the quality of life for the people living in the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site would be enhanced. The seed fund will aid the physical restoration and conservation of the premises with the application of smart technology, to provide relief on the cost of restoration. It will consequently prevent an increase in the rent charges and help maintain long-term tenancy of residents in the site. I understand GTWHI will be presenting this project on the third day of the conference, so please stay tuned.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although Malaysia is a land free from earthquakes and typhoons, we are however affected by climate change. In November 2017, Penang suffered flash floods after many hours of heavy downpour and it was a phenomenon that left a huge impact on most Penangites. For us to prepare ourselves and to protect our cultural heritage from any disasters, we are putting an emphasis on public safety through a UNESCO pilot project on Disaster Risk Management, working in collaboration with the Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage of Ritsumeikan University, Japan. I thank Prof Dr Rohit Jigyasu, who is one of our keynote speakers today, for his commitment and continued support towards George Town in making this city more resilient.

Over the past few years, GTWHI, with strong support from the local communities, has demonstrated much potential in the creative industries sector. We will work on nurturing this sector, which will boost the economy, and create jobs and household incomes through projects and collaborations. I am proud to announce here that George Town has been selected by UNESCO for two important projects - the Sub-Regional Inception Workshop on Linking World Heritage Sites and Local Cultural Assets through Museums, Information Centres and Creative Industries, as well as a pilot project on Intangible Heritage and Creativity for Sustainable Cities. We are grateful for their confidence and thank the UNESCO offices for recommending us to participate in these projects. We know it will pave the way for interactions between traditional, contemporary and new adventures in the field of cultural heritage, thus producing an excellent 'Made in George Town' brand, with high quality heritage tourism products that will generate income and improve the livelihood of the local people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As many of you may be aware of, we in Malaysia now have a new *Pakatan Harapan* government and we are in the process of restructuring, reviving and resuscitating our beloved country. Under the new political power, I am glad to welcome the representatives from the Federal Government to this conference. Credit also goes to Dato' Dr Zainah Ibrahim, the Heritage Commissioner of Malaysia and our second keynote speaker for the conference. I hope Dato' Dr Zainah with her team at the Department of National Heritage, and the Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO will continue to provide support to the site managers, and if possible, allocate funding for us to maintain the World Heritage Site.

We also hope our local, national, regional, and international partners will engage in a fruitful exchange of ideas towards holistic, pragmatic and innovative strategies in the management of urban cultural heritage. I can assure you that good food and warm hospitality will be provided to you during your stay in George Town, so please enjoy yourselves and give your best to make this international conference one of the best occasions of the year.

Before I end my speech, I would like to congratulate the team from George Town World Heritage Incorporated, under the leadership of their General Manager Dr Ang Ming Chee, for making this conference a success, and for making it a highlight event of the 10th anniversary celebration. Keep up the good work, continue serving the site and the communities to the best of your ability, and to be a source of inspiration for other heritage cities.

I also thank the speakers, moderators and participants for coming to the conference and may you have a pleasant stay in Penang.

To all the Penang people here, let us continue to work collectively in our efforts to enhance our capacity to build resilience and to ensure the sustainable development of the heritage city of George Town. Your support, cooperation and commitment are vital components for George Town to set an example for other World Heritage Sites. Together, we will inspire nations.

With this, I declare the International Conference on Managing Urban Cultural Heritage 2018 open.

Thank you.