

**WELCOMING REMARKS FOR  
GEORGE TOWN HERITAGE HABITAT SEED FUND LAUNCHING CEREMONY 2018  
BY  
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GEORGE TOWN WORLD HERITAGE INCORPORATED, PENANG**

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(VIP SALUTATIONS)

Dearest Communities  
Members of the Media  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon and welcome to George Town World Heritage Incorporated. Thank you for attending the launch for the George Town Heritage Habitat Seed Fund.

As a Penangite who grew up in downtown George Town, aka “*Poh Teh Lang*”, I understand the situation and need for affordable and comfortable living space in this town. Many of my friends and families have lived in traditional shophouses before. Some as primary tenants, while many sub-rented spaces and co-shared the house as their home.

We in George Town World Heritage Incorporated, are thankful for the willingness of the public in sharing with us their views, challenges, and suggestions to improve the living conditions of the town. We are indebted to the openness and political will of the State Government of Penang for seriously taking into consideration the bottom-up input, and they have subsequently entasked GTWHI to develop the George Town Heritage Habitat Seed Fund since 2016, which we have been working closely with YB Jagdeep and YAB Chief Minister Chow Kon Yew to measure the problems, collect data, and brainstorm on incentives to maintain sustainable and affordable living in George Town.

During our field survey and background studies between 2016 and 2018, we have identified that the repeal of the Rent Control Act in 1999 has caused irreversible change in the demography of George Town, where many unrecorded and uninventoried living cultural heritage have moved out from the George Town heritage enclave due to the increase in rent, amongst other factors. In response, the State Government built more low and medium cost housing outside the city, thus developing satellite cities in the central and southern parts of Penang island and in Seberang Perai, to provide better

housing quality for the people. Such proactive strategies have enabled many families to have their private space, their own living room, bathroom, and separate bedrooms for the family members for the very first time.

On the other hand, the beautiful city of George Town has been emptied as more houses no longer have families staying in them. It has also changed the economic ecology of trades and businesses in the town. There were serious challenges to maintain the town's integrity, until a new opportunity arrived in 2008 when George Town and Melaka, the Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca were jointly listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This George Town Heritage Habitat Seed Fund is a project fully supported by the State Government of Penang to address the ongoing challenges and restore the balance of sustainable development in the city. It is a groundbreaking and daring commitment from the State Government to safeguard the Outstanding Universal Values (OUVs) of a World Heritage Site by providing a financial incentive. Through this Seed Fund, we offer grants to restore heritage buildings and to enable long-term tenants to live in a comfortable and safer environment. We hope to promote sustainable residency in George Town, ensuring that this city is inhabited with communities of the highest social integrity. The fund aims to help heritage premises owners who are hosting long-term tenants to restore their buildings in exchange for a signed agreement of a prolonged tenancy period at affordable rent.

GTWHI was given RM3 million for the first phase of this Seed Fund to yield impactful changes to the ground as we kickstart this project. This project is certainly more complicated and challenging than it seems. It requires the cooperation, coordination and understanding from all parties for us to put this Seed Fund programme together. Rest assured that GTWHI will continue cracking our heads in providing solutions towards better management of the World Heritage Site, and we will uphold the values in our work. We know that this will not be an easy task but we will continue to strive for the best despite the difficulties and challenges ahead.

Lastly, I thank YAB Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow, the respective EXCO members from the State Government of Penang, the GTWHI Board of Directors, representatives from the kongsi, tenants and the local communities, as well as my team from GTWHI for attending the launch on this Saturday afternoon.

Together, we will safeguard George Town, and make it the most liveable heritage city in the region. Thank you.