

George Town UNESCO World Heritage Day Message on 7 July 2018
by
Penang Chief Minister YAB Tuan Chow Kon Yeow in George Town, Penang

It has been 10 years since UNESCO announced the inscription of Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca on the World Heritage List on 7 July 2008. Following this significant recognition, George Town has gradually grown as a world-renowned heritage property, with increasing commitment from stakeholders and recognition from all around the world.

Within the 259-hectare George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site, there exists 3,853 heritage buildings and 1,160 modern structures. They are owned, used and occupied by people for various purposes, constituting to the organic and vibrant growth of George Town. Such diversity has made George Town one of the most colourful, rich and complex heritage sites in the world.

Passing the 10-year mark has demonstrated the Pakatan Rakyat-led (now Pakatan Harapan) Penang State Government's commitment, capacity and courage in the management, protection and promotion of our World Heritage Site. Despite facing difficult and time-sensitive issues, we have endured all challenges and have persisted with the commitment to safeguard our cultural heritage for the future generations.

As the challenges to preserve our heritage become more complex where disasters and effects of climate change threaten our multicultural heritage and the living environment, we must renew and enhance our efforts to protect our precious site. Through George Town World Heritage Incorporated, *Majlis Bandaraya Pulau Pinang* and other state agencies, we work collectively with non-governmental organisations, international heritage agencies, educational institutions and the local communities in protecting our shared heritage. Such collaborations have yielded positive results as we see more people, local and international alike, flocking to Penang for our unique properties.

Being inscribed on the World Heritage List is not just an international recognition – it is a tool with the power to change and influence the minds of individuals for creativity, innovation and sustainable development, all of which are at the heart of the Penang State Government contribution' to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are also aware of the need for sustainable tourism, community empowerment and an efficient management system to conserve and protect the George Town World Heritage Site. The Penang State Government is therefore committed to go beyond the site's physical attributes and include the entire environment and interaction with the communities. We have applied UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape's approach in integrating the goals of urban heritage conservation as well as social and economic development. We see urban heritage as a social, cultural and economic asset for the development of cities, moving beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focusing on the human environment. We will take into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-

economic and environmental factors along with local community values. Heritage unites us regardless of our background, culture and faith.

With the Pakatan Harapan-led Federal Government, together with the Penang and Melaka State Governments, we look forward to a stronger collaboration between the site managers, local authorities and the communities in the protection, promotion and management of our shared cultural heritage. The Penang State Government has demonstrated our commitment and capacity in valuing our World Heritage Site. We have also been praised by UNESCO officers, advisory bodies and other site managers for our capable and credible management of our World Heritage Site through our efforts in the last 10 years. We hope the Federal Government can recognise our strong commitment with financial resources that are channelled to us annually.

The Penang State Government is committed to be the best custodian for the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site, and we will share our management experiences - both positive and bitter - with our peers from around the world. We will work proactively with UNESCO, international advisory bodies, professional agencies, as well as other sites, to make George Town the exemplary site. Through these exchanges, we hope to enhance our professional capacity and the involvement of local communities in the conservation and management of our cultural heritage. Therefore, I ask for the support of the people of Penang to work collectively and strive to make George Town an exemplary World Heritage Site.

CHOW KON YEOW