

WELCOME SPEECH

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Honorable Dr. Sharom bin Ahmat, Dr. Francis Loh, Dr. Tham Siew Yean, Prof. Surichai Wun’Gaeo, the API staff from around Asia, API Fellows. It gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to you today.

I would like to congratulate the 23 members of the ninth group of API Fellows attending this workshop, for completing your fellowships.

As you all know, the changes taking place in Asia are remarkable. The world is watching Asia now, more than ever before. Our region’s position in the world is rising.

On the other hand, we are facing both unresolved issues and new challenges. Poverty, discrimination, economic disparity, environmental problems and frictions are arising from cultural differences. Through such bodies as ASEAN, nations throughout the region are joining hands to deal with these issues. Yet, they are difficult to resolve at the governmental level alone. Solutions must also be sought by individuals from a wide variety of disciplines, by people who can contribute different perspectives. The API Fellowships Program offers precisely that chance. It offers you, public intellectuals who are willing to shoulder this task, the opportunity to research and enact your ideas.

You, my dear fellows are scholars, artists, journalists, filmmakers or some other kind of professional from one of five countries. You are active in many fields, including economic affairs, religion, the environment and music. Though each of you has an expertise that may lie (or that lies) in an area different from the rest, your goals are one and the same: the betterment of society. I believe this will become apparent at this workshop—the first opportunity for all of you in the ninth group to meet and present your activities.

I hope this workshop will convince each one of you to take advantage of the unique opportunity to learn from your colleagues’ endeavors. It is also a chance to have your work reviewed by people from other disciplines.

As you learn about subjects previously unknown or of little concern to you, you will find yourself struck by many new ideas. I hope you will make the most of them in your own work.

I hope too that you will ask yourselves these questions: Can I contribute to the research being described? Can I make use of it in my own research? What can I achieve by collaborating with the other Fellows?

Let me tell you about a real-life example of collaboration between API Fellows. An API Fellow, a journalist, had done a survey on the human organ trade. Another Fellow, a filmmaker, learned of the survey and wondered if the journalist’s message might not reach a wider audience through film. The two then combined their expertise and worked together on a documentary about the human organ trade. This was something that neither of them had considered before they happened to find themselves seated together during the API workshop.

Such encounters can be the starting point of deeply meaningful collaborations. On the API homepage (www.api-fellowships.org), you will find descriptions of the activities of past API Fellows, as well as their profiles and contact information. Please use this as a resource, and seek out potential research partners. As I said before, while you all go about your research in your own way, you all share a common desire to contribute to society. By combining your efforts, you can overcome problems that at first appear insurmountable.

Of course, I hope you will enlist the help of many others besides the API Fellows in your effort to build a better society. By recruiting many like-minded individuals, your activities are bound to grow and prosper.

Yet I expect even more of you as public intellectuals.

Please remember how important it is for you, as public intellectuals, to send a powerful message to those who are oblivious to society’s problems, as well as to those who are aware of them, but are not actively seeking solutions. You must try to encourage as many people as possible to make a positive contribution.

I know you use various tools to reach a wider public. However, you and I also know that we always need to consider whether our messages are reaching the right people or not. Secondly, we must be concerned about whether our messages are understood. I believe it is crucial to consider whom we are trying to reach, and what exactly we are trying to say.

Furthermore, if we are to work efficiently, we must be judicious in our selection of the media we use. This kind of strategic approach will surely have a major impact on our efforts to better society.

Therefore, I urge you to collaborate with each other to attain even better results, and to tell others about what you have achieved so that you can recruit more people to our cause. Only then will you have achieved the status of the true public intellectual.

Please use this workshop to get to know the other fellows. Do all you can to explore new possibilities for collaboration. More than anything, I hope you will use the mindset of the public intellectual, as I have described it, in your work for the betterment of society. With the completion of this workshop, you will become full-fledged, valued members of the API Community. With your participation, this community will be able to address Asia's challenges in several unique ways. It will become a force that guides Asia into the future.

I look forward to welcoming all 23 of you into the community.

Thank you very much.