

**CITATION BY PROFESSOR TEO YIK YING,
DEAN, SAW SWEE HOCK SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

**PUBLIC ORATOR FOR DR MARGARET CHAN,
RECIPIENT OF HONORARY DOCTOR OF SCIENCE**

**NUS COMMENCEMENT 2023, MAIN CEREMONY
THURSDAY, 6 JULY 2023
NUS UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE**

President of the Republic of Singapore and NUS Chancellor Madam Halimah Yacob,

Second Minister for Education, Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman,

NUS Pro-Chancellors,

NUS Chairman and Trustees,

NUS President,

Distinguished Honorary Graduand Dr Tony Tan,

Distinguished Honorary Graduand Dr Margaret Chan,

Graduates, Parents and Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Dr Margaret Chan has devoted her entire professional life working, and contributing, to improve global public health, and is a recognised global leader who has successfully transformed the landscape of public health.

Not many people will know that Margaret actually holds a professional degree as a teacher in home economics, before she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in home economics, and then a Doctor of Medicine from the University of Western Ontario in Canada in 1977. She joined the Government of British Hong Kong as a medical officer in 1978, before coming to Singapore to read the Master of Science in Public Health and Occupational Medicine at the National University of Singapore in 1985. This is equivalent to the Master of Public Health today.

Soon after, Margaret's career took on a leadership trajectory at the Hong Kong Department of Health, becoming the Assistant Director in 1989, Deputy Director in 1992, and then the first woman to be the Director in 1994.

Margaret joined the World Health Organization in 2003 as the Director of the Department for Protection of the Human Environment, and three years later, she became the Director-General of the WHO. She would go on to serve the world as the leader of the United Nations agency for health for the next ten years until 2017, before returning to Asia as a member of the Council of Advisors of the Bo'ao Forum for Asia.

Never one to be standing idle, Margaret courageously agreed to take on the challenge to start a School of Public Health at China's top Tsinghua University, where she was appointed the Founding Dean of the Vanke School of Public Health in 2020, where she continues till today. Coming full circle back to her first beginnings as a teacher, only now to the world, in global public health.

Professional Achievements

Throughout her almost five decades of selfless public service to the world, the descriptions of "unwavering determination" and "exceptional diplomacy" perhaps best illustrate Margaret's way of dealing with some of the world's most difficult health crises.

As the Director for the Department of Health in Hong Kong, Margaret led the successful response against the H5N1 avian influenza in 1997, and the 2003 SARS outbreak in Hong Kong. As the Director-General for the World Health Organization, she was responsible for WHO's efficient handling of the H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa from 2014 to 2016, and the Zika virus epidemic in 2017.

These major global health emergencies had the potential to wreck even more damage, both to lives and to economies, if not for the decisive leadership and coordination provided by Margaret.

Outside of pandemics and epidemics, Margaret has also been a tireless and relentless champion for strengthening health systems worldwide and I will cite just three examples out of many: first, as a strong advocate for Universal Health Coverage, which is a key strategy for achieving sustainable development and equitable access to healthcare services; second, in shining the spotlight on Women and Children's health to reduce maternal and infant mortality, and enhance access to reproductive health services; and third, in emphasising the importance of diplomacy and collaboration in global health, where many health challenges experienced locally still require the collective action by multiple sectors to tackle successfully.

Conclusion

Madam Chancellor, it is certainly not an exaggeration to say that the world is in a better place, and safer too, because of Dr Margaret Chan.

Her leadership during health emergencies around the world, her dedication to equity and improving the state of health services worldwide, and her diplomacy in tackling urgent health issues not only have saved lives, but also improved the lives and wellbeing of many around the world.

She is certainly no stranger to awards, and many universities worldwide have reached out to recognise Margaret with honorary titles. She has declined all of them. To her, there are not many places where Margaret will accept such a conferment.

NUS is one of them.

Because to Margaret, NUS played an important part in her journey to where she is today.

And today, she has returned.

Madam Chancellor, for her selfless dedication to improving and shaping the public health of the world, may it please you to confer on Dr Margaret Chan the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science.