

Inaugural Regen Asia Summit 2025
Welcome Address by NUS President, Professor Tan Eng Chye
Friday 4 July 2025, 9am, University Sports Centre Hall

Distinguished guests, colleagues, thought leaders and passionate youth participants,

Good morning. On behalf of the National University of Singapore, I bid you a warm welcome to our inaugural Regen Asia Summit 2025. NUS is privileged and delighted to host this special event on our campus grounds.

The Regen Asia Summit reminds us of our shared humanity as well as common interests as citizens in a globalised, interdependent world. Regardless of our national, social or economic backgrounds, we all have a stake in the future of this region – and indeed, our planet. I am encouraged to see talented youths in the region stepping up to become changemakers. The youth participants in our midst are motivated to build strong, sustainable and resilient systems for future generations to thrive and prosper in.

RAS is entirely student-led. I am impressed by the quality of the organisation of the event and programmes that they have put together. It is no mean feat to organise an event of this scale. The RAS EXCO has conceived and created an event that would have continuity for youths across Southeast Asia. Please give them a round of applause.

Asia at a Crossroads: The Urgency of Regeneration

Over the past few decades, Asia has achieved unprecedented economic growth and progress, lifting millions out of poverty. Living standards have improved dramatically. Notwithstanding, rapid development, economic activity and urbanisation also present strains and challenges. Issues such as environmental degradation, destruction of natural ecosystems, societal divides, competing priorities and the erosion of social resilience are all coming to the fore.

In response and for some time now, the United Nations has been championing sustainable development. The UN has set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals, calling on countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. The goals recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address social needs, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

Why Regeneration?

Regen Asia Summit or RAS aims to take things just one step further, that is, from Sustainability to Regeneration. Regeneration is a proactive and ambitious approach to heal the past and enhance the present - to nurture resilience and restore vitality to society and our environment. The premise of regeneration is really very simple – for all life to thrive. It goes beyond sustaining current processes, endeavoring to create cycles of rebirth and strengthening all living things to become more resilient to crises. Regeneration promotes biodiversity by giving every part of the ecosystem the means to function, flourish and become better.

RAS will explore the theme of Regeneration across six core domains, namely Culture and Society, Ecology, Economy, Governance and Civil Society, Built Environment and Life, and Wellbeing. This broad framing sets RAS apart, moving beyond the circular economy to embrace a holistic perspective.

Challenges in Asia

Regeneration is particularly pertinent to us in Asia as our rich natural ecosystems and ecological diversity are all coming under strain. Deforestation and forest degradation have resulted from agricultural expansion, logging and infrastructure development, leading to biodiversity loss and soil erosion. Industrialization and urbanisation have intensified water, air and soil pollution, with marine ecosystems under threat from waste and coastal degradation. Climate change is causing more extreme weather in the form of floods, droughts and typhoons.

For many reasons, responses to such complex challenges have been limited. Environmental monitoring may be fragmented by the lack of comprehensive monitoring systems. Governance, policy and enforcement are also challenging as sustainability and regeneration are evolving fields, and there are many competing priorities to contend with. The science is complex, and the costs-benefit analyses are not always straightforward. Effective restorative projects require long-term, cross-sectoral and often cross-country collaboration; but project scopes can only cover a narrow range of species or targets when funding is limited, and this undermines ecosystem resilience.

As is evident, the challenges to regeneration are complex and interconnected, spanning environmental, economic, social, legal, policy and governance. Addressing them will require scientific input, as well as coordinated, long-term, and inclusive approaches that actively restore, regenerate, and reimagine the region's natural and human systems.

Role of Regen Asia Summit

Notwithstanding all these complexities, I am encouraged to see that youths across Southeast Asia, such as all of you in our midst today, are rising to the call and challenge of regeneration. Indeed, one of the advantages of Southeast Asia, is our relatively young population. Today's youths are highly educated digital natives; they are leading and championing issues, raising awareness, engaging in grassroots events, driving innovation and regeneration. They also serve as a bridge between traditional cultures and experiences, and modern perspectives and solutions. Their enthusiasm, ideals and dynamism inspire societal hope and change.

Through the partnership between the Regen Asia Summit and the Asian Undergraduate Symposium, Regen Asia 2025 brings together around 100 impact leaders and 600 undergraduates from across Southeast Asia. We hope this will be a platform for interested and motivated youths to exchange ideas, deepen skills, and build networks that will drive the regeneration in their communities and beyond.

Beyond ideas and discussions, RAS is designed to catalyse action and foster solutions that heal past degradation, restore ecological balance, and strengthen community resilience through interdisciplinary collaboration and actionable frameworks. The I-4 Model – that is, Inspire, Ideate, Intercultural, and Implement will steer conversations towards actionable outcomes and fruitful partnerships. By combining academic discourse with practical solutions, RAS empowers the next generation to transform challenges into opportunities for real, lasting change.

Closing

To all the participants of Regen Asia Summit 2025, I hope you will take this opportunity to exchange ideas, broaden your horizons, develop cross-cultural skills, and forge networks in the region. As you embark on two days of learning, innovation and interaction, I encourage you to think boldly and compassionately about how and what you can contribute to regeneration and realising our shared ideals of sustainability, diversity, equity, inclusivity and our cultural heritage. On this note, I wish every one of you an enjoyable and enriching Summit. Thank you.