NUS Commencement 2026
Main Ceremony Speech by NUS President, Professor Tan Eng Chye
Thursday, 9 July 2026
NUS University Cultural Centre

The Human Dimensions of Higher Education

President of the Republic of Singapore and NUS Chancellor

NUS Pro-Chancellors

NUS Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and Trustees

Distinguished Honorary Graduands

Distinguished Guests, Graduates, Parents and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

The 2026 Commencement season begins – and this morning, we celebrate graduates from the School of Continuing and Lifelong Education, who are receiving master's degrees in Artificial Intelligence and Innovation, and in Environmental Management.

One chapter closes and another begins, and you are stepping into a world of new possibilities and some measure of uncertainty. This year's reception to commencement speeches have reflected the anxieties and trepidation, as well as the hopes and possibilities of the new world into which you are graduated.

It is at such thresholds and liminal spaces that we are encouraged to reflect and draw strength from our accumulated knowledge, which is the real meaning of higher education.

There is no doubt in my mind, that knowledge – its pursuit, accumulation and use – is the most human of all endeavours and it is our duty to bend this to the service of all mankind. This applies to AI, as it has to all new technologies.

With these new technologies, there will be frictions and costs and disruptions, and there will be opportunities to do great wrong, as there are to do great good.

Because we are human and curious, we innovate and create; because we are human and fallible, each generation will make mistakes. But if we are careful and honest and thoughtful, the next generation can right our wrongs.

We have seen this with the environment, we are now seeing this with the use of social media, we will soon see this with AI.

Our hope – that all the knowledge we produce, will be used for good, and not for evil – our hope lies in you. Each one of you who graduate today, you will become leaders in the society of tomorrow. And you have completed an outstanding education, not just in AI or environment, or any discipline, but in a body of knowledge that has

educated you in building a better world. This same body of knowledge has enabled you to think critically, work across boundaries and disciplines, and finally, to contribute to something larger than yourself – to a team, a community and our society.

In a world where technology can amplify both good and harm, values matter more than ever. In NUS, we have long recognised this – 10 years ago, we have evolved our educational curriculum to cross disciplines; five years ago, we have integrated student life into our curriculum, seeing education both inside and outside the classroom as one.

We see these changes reflected in the education of the Class of 2026.

Mr Hafiz Maruf Akbar grew up in Aceh, Indonesia, and witnessed the aftermath of the devastating 2004 tsunami. Inspired to better understand how communities respond to crises and how policies shape lives, he enrolled in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. There, he deepened his expertise in international affairs while continuing to serve others, including volunteering in the 2025 floods in Aceh and in international relief. His work has benefited many in the darkest moments of their lives. He was awarded the Dean's Leadership Award in 2026.

Mr Huang Chao Hung crosses the discipline of maths and music. A Data Science and Analytics major, he also studied music at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. This year, he becomes the first graduate of the Second Major in Performing Arts. As a student leader in the NUS Chinese Orchestra, he led performances which integrated music, storytelling and the visual arts. He composes and produces his own multimedia works.

Hafiz and Chao Hung are two amazing stories out of many, but each one from the Class of 2026 have your own stories of resilience, dedication and discovery. I want you to know that, as graduates of NUS, you are in good company.

This morning, we are deeply honoured to recognise two outstanding individuals as honorary graduates of NUS.

Our first honorary graduand, Ms Kay Kuok, is a distinguished leader whose steadfast dedication has left a lasting impact on NUS and Singapore.

Trained as a barrister in London, she built her career in corporate leadership. As Chair of the National Healthcare Group, she guided one of Singapore's largest healthcare systems through transformation, supported the establishment of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, and provided steady leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Her service to NUS has been equally significant. As a former member of the Board of Trustees and founding Chair of the Yale-NUS College Governing Board, she played a pivotal role in shaping Singapore's first liberal arts college, whose legacy continues through NUS College.

Our second honorary graduand, Professor Lim Pin, is a distinguished clinician, educator, and university leader whose contributions have profoundly shaped both NUS and Singapore.

As NUS' longest serving Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lim played a transformative role

in strengthening medical education and research, and in advancing NUS as a modern, comprehensive university.

Beyond the University, his leadership has shaped national science, health and ethical policy. Through his roles on the Economic Development Board, National Biotechnology Committee, Bioethics Advisory Committee, and most significantly, the National Wages Council, he has worked tirelessly for the public good, including for the good of millions of Singaporean workers through fair and competitive wage reforms.

We are proud to be able to honour Ms Kay Kuok and Professor Lim Pin today. *(pause for applause)*

As you step out today, you must realise that the future will not be defined by technological advances or economic trends, but by the choices people make.

This is the real test of your education. While your time as students might have come to an end, your connection with NUS prevails as members of our global community of alumni.

There will no longer be exams, and not every problem has a right or wrong answer. But the decisions you make must stand to scrutiny, and you will be measured by the impact you make.

We look forward to seeing the many ways in which you will get things right, to contribute to your professions, your communities and the wider world. I wish you every success, fulfilment and happiness in the years ahead.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026!