

**SPEECH BY SEAH KIAN PENG, 11TH SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,
DURING THE ELECTION OF SPEAKER ON 2 AUGUST 2023**

Hon Members, I would like to thank the Leader of the House, Ms Indranee Rajah, and hon Member Ms Denise Phua for proposing and seconding my nomination as the Speaker of the House. I thank the Leader of the House for her kind words of support and encouragement.

I deeply appreciate the support of all Members here, for my election as the 11th Speaker of Parliament since our first Legislative Assembly. I am honoured by your trust and confidence, and it is a privilege that I take seriously.

I would like to thank members of the public, especially my residents, who showed their support when the announcement of my nomination was made almost 12 days ago. Your encouragement has bolstered my confidence and determination to carry out my duties as Speaker of Parliament effectively.

I know that some of my residents are concerned about my ability to raise issues affecting ordinary Singaporeans while serving as the Speaker. The paradox in Parliament is that the Speaker himself or herself often does

not speak. But in this, as in so much of my public service over the past decades, action must do in place of words.

Although my role requires me to abstain from participating in debates, I want to assure my residents that I will continue to advocate their concerns and express my views on matters impacting the lives of Singaporeans and their family through alternative channels.

Allow me to say a few words about my predecessor, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin. I have known Chuan-Jin since 2011 when he joined the Marine Parade Group Representation Constituency (GRC) team. He was a good colleague and had served his residents well.

During his time as Speaker, he made commendable efforts to demystify the work of parliamentary process and enhance public awareness of Parliament through social media engagement and dialogues with the younger generation, and in turn, fostering a better understanding of this important institution among Singaporeans.

Hon Members, I am fully aware of the weight of this responsibility, and I pledge to discharge my duties impartially, firmly and fairly, ensuring the orderly conduct of parliamentary business. We all share a common goal

– that is, to serve the people of Singapore, and I am committed to giving my best to achieve it.

In my first Parliamentary session in 2006, the Speaker then was Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, who was unanimously elected. Rising to speak on the occasion, Mr Low Thia Kiang reminded the Speaker of the need for fairness. He said: “Sir, you have been re-elected again and I believe that in your past years as Speaker of the House, your eyesight has been trained to be as sharp as a razor and to be swift as lightning, and I think we can all expect that whoever wishes to speak will catch your eye.”

So, my first point is this: I wish to assure Members on both sides of the House that I intend for my eyes to be easily caught too!

Second, I want to recall what the then Leader of the House, Mr Wong Kan Seng, said in that 2006 session. He reminded MPs that our role comes with a great responsibility. And he said, I quote: “We are elected by the people to represent their interest and we must perform our duties with a high standard of honesty and integrity. We must never abuse the privileges accorded to us as Members and must be worthy of the House which we are elected to.”

In the performance of our duty, I want to place on record today, our thanks and best wishes to fellow Members Mr Liang Eng Hwa and Mr Faisal Manap, who are both on the road to recovery. This is a reminder to Members of our own mortality and fragility.

We are all too human – and as recent events have reminded us, our weaknesses are not only physical but also spiritual and moral. I say this not to join with the chorus of sanctimony but to reflect, first on the need for us all to be vigilant in our personal conduct and choices, vigilant with ourselves first of all, but also with our colleagues. To hold one another to account, not to fear to tell truth to power, nor be slow to listen to hard truths.

I say this to point to the rules and codes of conduct which govern us all, as members of the highest rule making body in the land, and equally, as members of political parties.

This is a reminder that even though we, as individual humans, may fail, these rules and institutions – which apply without exception – do not.

And so, onto my last point. I started my speech by recalling the first parliamentary session which I attended as an MP and what the Speaker

at that time said. I must confess that I actually did not remember any of it – and had to look it up in the Hansard!

So, that is the last thing I wanted to remind Members – that you and I are here for a day, for a fleeting number of terms, but our words here, and our work here, live on far beyond us. We must therefore remember and bear the weight of our office with dignity and a constant sense of duty.

Today, we are seeing the latest batch of Nominated MPs taking their Oath of Allegiance; we have 85 Parliamentary Questions for Oral Answer. There is a Ministerial Statement, two Bills for Second Reading and one Motion to follow. Our work is certainly complicated as it is important. We need to do this work, knowing we are all too human; and therefore, we must self-exceed and surpass ourselves in order to meet the standards of a Parliamentarian.

It is this that I urge us all, Members of the House, to turn to our paramount duty – to serve the people of Singapore.

I look forward with cautious optimism that, even during spirited debates, you, the hon Members, will maintain the highest standards of decorum and conduct that are fitting for this esteemed House.

By all means, debate and speak with passion and conviction, but let us all ensure we keep to and uphold the rules that we had all signed up to when we became Parliamentarians in this House. This applies to elected MPs, NCMPs and NMPs. I ask all of you to also help me to help you and our Parliament achieve this.

On this note, I express my deepest gratitude to all of you for your trust and support. Thank you, Hon Members.