

SPEECH BY MS SULASTRI BINTE KAMIS ON BEHALF OF 2025 POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Guest-of-Honour, Ms Jasmin Lau, Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Digital Development and Information;
Mr Lawrence Tan, Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation;
Professor Eugene Tan, Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation Postgraduate Scholarship Committee;
Mr Osbert Lyman and Mr Benjamin Lyman of the Li Siong Tay Charitable Foundation;
Distinguished guests, fellow scholarship recipients, ladies and gentlemen—good evening.

Thank you for joining us, and for giving me the honour of speaking on behalf of the 2025 Tan Kah Kee Postgraduate Scholars cohort.

I want to begin by expressing our heartfelt thanks to the Tan Kah Kee Foundation, the Postgraduate Scholarship Committee, and the generous donors here. Your support does more than ease the financial burden of postgraduate study. It is an act of faith. It tells each of us: *We believe in you. We believe in your commitment and your vision.*

On behalf of all this year's scholarship recipients—thank you for seeing us, and for giving us the means to go further.

I never imagined I'd one day be called a *scholar*.

It always felt like a word reserved for perfect GPAs and people who seemed to get everything “right.” That wasn't me. My journey wasn't linear. My grades weren't perfect. But what I lacked on paper, I built in real life—working with communities, learning by listening, observing, and being present.

To me, this scholarship is more than financial help. It is a sign of belief in my potential, a responsibility to honour the founder's values, and a reminder that resilience, perseverance, and hard work pay off.

Most of all, it feels like someone saying: *We see you. We see your journey. We see your struggles. And we want to help you keep going.*

I will be pursuing a Master of Public Health at Columbia University, in the Sociomedical Sciences Department. And yes, for those wondering, I did get my US visa.

Why public health? Because I believe health is so much more than medicine. It's about understanding people in all their complexity—their histories, communities, beliefs, and struggles.

There's a quote I hold close to my heart:

“It is far more important to know what person the disease has than what disease the person has.” – Hippocrates.

This wisdom reminds us that health is never just about symptoms or diagnoses—it is about the human being behind them.

My decision to pursue an MPH was inspired by work I have been privileged to do, specifically in addressing health disparities within the Malay community.

Through that work, I witnessed first-hand the real challenges of solving health disparities. Those experiences didn't just open my eyes—they lit a fire in me. I realised that if we want to improve health, we can't just treat diseases in clinics. We need to understand the communities people come from. We need to ask better questions about why these disparities exist and how to change them.

I want learn how to design, evaluate, and advocate for solutions that are evidence-based yet deeply empathetic. Because good public health is not just about policies or interventions—it's about people.

It's about ensuring that every person, regardless of race, language, or religion, can be seen, heard, and cared for.

This scholarship connects us to the legacy of Mr Tan Kah Kee, whose vision for education was never just about individual success but collective progress.

It asks all of us: *What will you do with what you've been given? How will you carry this torch forward?*

So as we embark on our academic adventure, let us remember those who have stood behind us, cheering us on. Let that be the torch that lights the way.

I'd also like to thank those who have been my pillars.

To my husband—thank you for your unwavering belief in me and constant encouragement.

To my dad—thank you for teaching me the values you lived as a Singapore national athlete: self-discipline, focus, and resilience. Those values shaped me into the person I am today.

To our mentors, friends, and families—you have challenged us, taught us, and held us up when we faltered. This honour is yours as much as it is ours.

To my fellow scholarship recipients—I am humbled to stand among you. Each of you brings your own passions, convictions, and dreams about how to serve your communities, our nation, and the world.

In closing, thank you for this incredible honour and for believing in students like us. Your support is not just an investment in our future, but in the future of our society.

Thank you.