

**SPEECH BY MOS ZAQY MOHAMAD  
AT THE SINGAPORE REAL ESTATE CONFERENCE  
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A very good afternoon to all of you. Congratulations once again to the four industry associations for organising this inaugural conference. I'm delighted to join you this afternoon.

When I first took over this portfolio and met with the industry associations in July 2018, I was encouraged by their efforts to prepare members for technological disruption, and urged them to come together to play a proactive role in industry development. Today, I am happy to see that the industry associations have achieved their first milestone by organising this conference.

**Why are industry associations important?**

Industry associations are important to Singapore. They play an instrumental role in shaping the future of their industries.

As aggregators of interests, needs and resources of businesses, industry associations are critical to the continuing good health of the business ecosystem. They bring productivity gains and good job opportunities for everyone here, for people in the industry, and become valuable partners of businesses, workers and the Government.

With the rise of the digital technology, industry associations are even more important as technology offers new ways to conduct businesses. Industry associations are well placed to help industries identify and seize these opportunities.

**Important roles industry associations can play in the Real Estate Industry**

In the real estate industry, industry associations are particularly important as the property transaction process comprises many distinct stakeholders, from property agents, to developers, to lawyers, bankers and Government agencies – each one of them plays a very different role. We need the industry associations to play a coordinating role to bring different players together to agree and adopt industry-wide solutions. It is more important than before that we look at some of these developments, understand these trends, get feedback from the industry, and work together to see – not just from a regulation perspective – how to make this work, to make it better for all in the industry. Let me share two areas in which industry associations can step up to this role:

The first area is setting and promoting industry-wide standards needed for end-to-end digitalisation of property transactions.

Under the Digitalised Property Transactions Workgroup, industry associations have helped to develop standard contract templates for rental of residential properties, and are currently doing the same for private residential properties. This will benefit the industry in future: property agents will be able to facilitate transactions with greater efficiency and accuracy, as digital standard contracts can be automatically verified and electronically transferred from

clients, banks and lawyers. These are ways we can use technology to make life easier for everyone.

However, in order for the industry to reap these benefits, industry-wide adoption of these standard contracts will be required. Industry associations will then be key to realising this. Firstly, they will play an important role in getting buy-in from all their members to use these standard contracts. Secondly, as these standard contracts are adopted across industry, it is likely that consumers and agents will have feedback too. Therefore, industry associations will play a crucial role in aggregating this and recommending appropriate changes to the standard contracts so they can remain relevant.

The second area is aggregating resources to help small- and medium-sized agencies transform alongside bigger players.

Technology adoption requires scale to justify investments. Industry associations can provide technology solutions which smaller agencies will find hard to implement themselves and adopt on their own. I am glad that industry associations are currently doing this to help the smaller agencies level up against the backdrop of the entire industry. For example, agents can conduct checks to combat money laundering and terrorism financing on-the-go via IEA's mobile app. Through SoReal, SEAA's 'RealAgent' app enables agents to e-schedule property viewings and generate reports with real-time transaction data. SISV's all-in-one CloseBuy app provides agents with regional marketplace coverage. With these tools, small- and medium-sized agencies can level up and keep pace with the transformation that's happening across the industry. Now for the industry associations as well, if you need greater access to Government data to automate some of this time-consuming work such as due diligence checks, industry associations can also work with us, with CEA to get these data released, and we will do our best to facilitate some of these works, to make it more productive and efficient for the industry to perform these transactions;

Industry associations are also best positioned to encourage and support small- and medium-sized agencies to tap on Government grants, such as the Productivity Solutions Grant and the Enterprise Development Grant, to improve their internal capabilities.

Aside from this, industry associations can play a constructive role in setting higher standards of professional behaviour and service quality. This is an important role as consumer trust is key to the success of the industry and the industry's reputation can be easily tarnished by the acts of a few errant property agencies and agents. I will like to share about an agent who has provided exemplary service to his clients.

Mr Peter Toh is an agent from OrangeTee & Tie, who believes that estate agency work is essentially a "human business". He had assisted his client, who was diagnosed with stage four cancer, in completing the sale of her flat. As his client was physically too weak to make the trip to HDB's office, Peter went the extra mile and arranged for an HDB officer to visit his client at her home, and successfully completed the document signing. Unfortunately, his client passed away shortly after moving in, but Peter's efforts helped fulfil his client's last wish, which was to move into her new home.

Peter also leveraged resources such as technological tools provided by his agency to increase his productivity. These include using a mobile app to access information on all types of properties, and another to create 360-degree virtual tours of properties to help clients market their properties.

I encourage the industry to learn from Peter, to always put the interest of clients first and strive for higher service standards. To help agents attain higher service standards, industry associations play an integral role in enhancing the capabilities of agents.

This can be done through making available training opportunities, to equip agents with broad-based knowledge. Today's conference line-up is a good start. The presentations on property tax and stamp duties contribute to an agent's professional knowledge, while investment strategies and property market outlook are relevant areas of general knowledge that can help agents provide value-added service to clients.

In addition, industry associations can curate and promote courses that develop relevant knowledge and skills needed for the digital economy. For example, with enhanced digital literacy and understanding of the possibilities that technology can offer, agents will be better equipped to use digital tools to better engage consumers online, maximise productivity gains and potentially provide more innovative solutions to consumers. Since the launch of the Real Estate Industry Transformation Map in February 2018, about 5,200 Key Executive Officers (KEOs) and agents have attended digital literacy courses, including the SkillsFuture for Digital Workplace programme. I commend them for actively levelling up their digital literacy, and invite the rest of the industry to join in the learning. I also encourage the industry associations to actively promote attendance of these courses amongst their members.

### **How industry associations can grow**

I have described how industry associations play an important role in the real estate agency industry. In order for industry associations to do this effectively, I challenge the industry associations to consider two ways they can grow themselves.

First, make membership an attractive and rewarding experience. Currently, about 20 per cent of property agents are members of at least one industry association. To serve the industry at large, industry associations need to ensure that the industry's diverse views are well represented. What this means is that we hope that industry associations can grow their membership. They should find innovative ways to make attractive membership offerings, such as through exclusive access to super apps, or through devoting resources to give members a platform to be heard. Members – I urge you to join these discussions, share best practices and solutions that you think can benefit both the industry and consumers. I'm sure many of you are familiar with apps and technological concepts outside, that could be imported into the real estate industry, and make your consumer experience a lot better.

Second, seek opportunities to enhance capabilities. To support industry transformation, industry associations can walk the talk by seeking technology solutions to make themselves more productive, and also enhance their technical and research capabilities to develop innovative and industry-specific solutions. So it would be great for the industry associations

to think of new initiatives to enable themselves to serve the industry better. If funding is required, government grants are available for capability development projects that are undertaken by industry associations. One example is the Local Enterprise and Association Development (LEAD) programme offered by Enterprise Singapore. We are happy to facilitate this application of grants should you have ideas to help transform and make the industry more productive.

## **Conclusion**

Industry associations are the voice of the industry and can be advocates for transformation. These are crucial to the continued success of the real estate agency industry. I urge the industry associations to work closely together – today is a wonderful first start to co-organise this conference – and to become standard bearers and leaders for change in the industry, so that we can raise the professionalism of the industry to serve consumers better. Today's jointly organised conference, titled "Moving Forward Together", is a good start. I look forward to seeing more of such initiatives from the industry associations.

I wish you a fruitful conference. Thank you.