Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening,

- Thank you for joining us on the inaugural European Union Writers Festival.

- I am delighted to launch officially the European Union Writers Festival tonight. I would first like to offer my special thanks to LASALLE President Steve Dixon, LASALLE Vice-President Venka Purushothaman, the Programme Leader of the MA in Creative Writing Darryl Whetter and their team who have backed this festival from its very inception.

- 2017 marks 60 years of the European Union. This year, we celebrate EU’s engagement across the world and in the city-state. While reflecting on our past achievements, this is a fitting moment to work on new avenues of cooperation to strengthen our long-established cultural ties in the city-state.

To open this festival, I will touch on where the festival comes from before moving on to our partnership with LASALLE College of the Arts.

I. The European Union Writers Festival intends to expand our cultural programmes through a celebration of literature

- A few days ago, we closed the 27th edition of the European Union Film Festival, the EU’s flagship cultural event in Singapore. With 27 movies from 27 European countries it allowed us to encapsulate the diverse European cultures. This year, for the first time, we presented the festival in an iconic cultural venue, the National Gallery Singapore. We had a record attendance of 5000 viewers.

- Culture has indeed become a core pillar of EU External Action, following the adoption of the Strategy for International Cultural Relations last year.
• Just like films, books and literature possess the power to stir ideas. They take on pressing issues the world faces today from a multitude of perspectives, triggering necessary dialogue and debate. To review and expand our existing cultural programmes, we are exploring the diverse synergies available in arts and culture. This is how the European Union Writers Festival was born. After nine months of gestation, the new project adds to the rich cultural dialogue between Europe and Singapore.

II. The partnership with LASALLE College of the Arts for this inaugural edition is a major added value to the festival.

• Singapore, as a major cultural hub in Southeast Asia, is a unique platform for the EU to engage in a sustained cultural dialogue. We are delighted to partner with LASALLE College of the Arts, an established higher-education arts institution where the future leading voices of Singapore arts scene are being provided with the best training in fine arts. With the first Creative Writing Programme in Southeast Asia, the College provides a crucial innovative platform to host the inaugural edition of a festival dedicated to wordsmiths.

• This collaboration not only gives the EUWF the opportunity to grow in the future, it also reinforces the excellent cultural cooperation between the EU and Singapore, and Southeast Asia more broadly. This inaugural project has a particular resonance for the EU in South East Asia, as we celebrate 40 years of EU-ASEAN relations this year.

III.

• This open-air area is a fitting venue to welcome four fresh voices from Singapore and Europe tonight. Each of them will feature, in their own words, the many themes in European contemporary literature.

• Tomorrow, you will have the chance to engage in discussions with European and Singaporean authors on a wide range of topics related to literature. In addition to talented European writers and publishers, we will have the pleasure of welcoming leading figures
of Singapore publishing and movie industries - Edmund Wee and Kenneth Tan.

- Another first: we are partnering with the British Council in an effort to present a more inclusive Festival. The British Council will introduce sign-language interpretation for participants with hearing impairments.

- I am very much excited about what this inaugural festival means for European literature in Singapore. I’d wish to thank our member states for providing us excellent suggestions to take this festival forward.

- I wish you all an excellent opening night.