

**TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS BY CE/IMDA MR LEW CHUEN HONG AT THE  
FORUM OF SMALL STATES RECEPTION ON THE LAUNCH OF DIGITAL FOSS  
GENEVA, 24 OCTOBER 2022**

Introduction

1. Kids do say the darnedest things. But often with that unfiltered lens comes great insights. I am a father of three kids, and it reminded me that the digital future actually belongs to our children, and what we do here today, will have a real impact on how they shape their future – in an amazing and wonderful ways.
  
2. Ambassador Umej Singh Bhatia,  
The UN Tech Envoy Amandeep Gill,  
ITU Secretary-General-Elect Doreen Bogdan-Martin,  
Excellencies and friends.

Thank you so much for the warm welcome. It is indeed a great pleasure to be here meeting everybody face to face.

The Digital Landscape Today

3. I was asked to share a little bit about digital. I will start by rewinding the clock to say that the world today is quite different from what it was back in the 80s or the 90s. For those of us that are old enough, when we were growing up, international calls had to be made using a calling card. Today, it is a click away on WhatsApp. Some of us work with telex machines, and the internet then was something we could hear. Why? Because of the characteristic screech of the modem dialling in to the internet. Today, teams work together online, across time-zones and seamlessly across continents. When I was a kid, we kick around a ball in the field. Today, the kids are connecting and growing up in a digital world, talking to their friends through their mobile devices.
  
4. So, in many ways, the future is already here. It is just not evenly distributed. And that, I think has a disproportionate impact on small states. For example, the lack of large markets makes it more difficult to scale technological innovation. A critical mass of investments is needed to drive R&D. It is more challenging, at the core, to develop the large datasets that are needed to fuel things such as machine learning and artificial intelligence. Smaller countries can be left behind very quickly as the speed of change accelerates. Digital is also what we call, a **Commons**. But it is sometimes difficult to have a voice at international fora, in shaping those rules and norms of this emerging digital space. Debates can also be highly technical.

5. What is the potential risk? A widened digital divide, both between countries and within countries, and we saw this during the pandemic when work and schools moved online. I think the effects on the economies and our children in particular, are still reverberating around the world.

### Digital FOSS

6. So, like that first intrepid band of 3 founding FOSS Ambassadors that started the movement more than 30-years ago, we now find ourselves faced with a similar situation – in an emerging and perhaps, a slightly uncertain digital world. However, the impact is no less profound – it comes with both opportunities as well as risks, and we often wonder for a small country like Singapore, whether that small size will dictate our destiny.
7. In my view, the difference from 30-years ago is that the traditional laws of physics do not quite apply in the same way today. Of course, in the physical world, size does matter. But in the digital world, if we play our cards right, we can come together to amplify the power of information and collectively grow our heft.
8. And we can do this by leveraging the potential of FOSS and that “**Digital FOSS**” – both as a community as well as a movement that can better enable all of us, and better include all our communities.

### *Enable*

9. First, to enable. I think it is important to enable small states to build capabilities.
10. We will support that with capacity-building workshops and study visits to address many of the common challenges that we faced. For example, how do we ensure that the infrastructure and connectivity, from your broadband all the way to 5G remains open and accessible to all. How do we organise ourselves to leverage e-government and digital services, especially in areas such as healthcare and education to benefit our citizens. How do we upgrade skills to create new digital opportunities at all levels of society, including, for small and medium sized enterprises, to harness digital as part of their sustainable digital transformation. And finally, how do we ensure that small states are able to approach data and have access to data flows across countries, while balancing the privacy and potential security concerns.

11. We think partnership is key. We aim to provide a practical avenue to bring FOSS members together as well as that connection between problem owners and problem solvers, through an Open Innovation Platform that links both the public and the private sectors. Through this, we aim to build a community that is able to share best practices and enhance collective capability.

### *Include*

12. Second, to include. To ensure that small states are included into platforms that are shaping our digital future. I think this is especially critical as key discussions are upcoming at the UN and ITU on the Global Digital Compact – staying the course on our sustainable development goals. And also, the Summit of the Future.
13. I think FOSS will help bring small states together and continue to be a convening platform here in Geneva, New York, and Vienna – to engage and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues, be it across Governments, industry, academia, and civil society. This includes building key partnerships with the UN Tech Envoy's Office, the ITU, and UNDP.

### *Architect*

14. So, to enable and to include – but ultimately, bringing them together is to collectively **architect that digital future** for all of us.
15. And that future is a **Digital Commons**. It is imperative to foster common rules and norms where everyone can benefit. It will not be realistic to say there is no technological competition. But that does not mean we cannot find common ground. In fact, we must – because if we do not close those digital divides, we will not be able to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals.

### Conclusion

16. In conclusion, if I were to refer back to the wisdom of our children, what struck me was the intuition of that little boy when he said: “when small states come together, we become much bigger!”.

17. The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FOSS is therefore opportune to reinforce that *raison d'être* of why FOSS was started – to deal with an uncertain geopolitical world. Many would argue, the incoming digital wave is similarly going to have a profound impact, and small states will have to collectively support each other in this emerging digital domain.

18. I am very excited to embark on this **Digital FOSS** journey, and in our own small ways, to help support and architect our collective digital future.

19. So, let me invite everyone to raise their glasses for a toast – And in the wise words of Yoda: “Size does not matter” — May the FOSS be with you!

. . . . .