

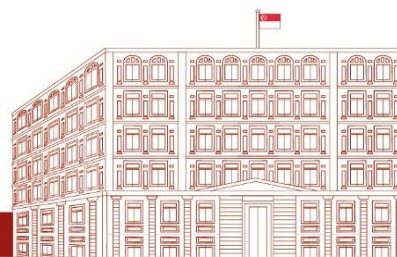
OPENING REMARKS BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE DBS-JUDICIARY-MCI HACKATHON FOR A BETTER WORLD 2021 JUDGING DAY ON 7 OCTOBER 2021

Words of Appreciation and Introduction

1. I would like to thank DBS and the Singapore Judiciary for working with the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) to co-organise this hackathon. This event is a Private-Public partnership which supports the theme of the Sunlight Alliance for Action (AfA), comprising 48 men and women dedicated to tackling online harms against women and girls, and which I have the privilege of co-chairing with my colleague Parliamentary Secretary Ms Rahayu Mahzam.
2. Congratulations to all the teams for your hard work. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.
3. I would like to share first, about the digital safety gap facing women and girls, and second, about the digital solutions we need to close the gap.

The Digital Safety Gap Facing Women And Girls

4. In Singapore, women and girls do not live with the fear of being out alone in public or at night. But their experience online can be quite different. The instances of online sexual harassment and trolling being reported, or accounts of some women and girls reconciling themselves to such behaviour as the “norm”, are a grave cause for concern. There is also the possibility that online harms are correlated in some way with the propensity to commit sexual or hurt offences offline.
5. Singapore Police statistics of sexual offences involving non-consensual sharing of private intimate images and voyeurism are disturbing. Between January and August this year, there were 473 such cases recorded. The year before, there were 650 cases. In other words, the Police have been alerted to more than one sexual offence of this nature almost every day for the last two years. And these are just the reported cases.
6. The digital safety gap for women and girls must be taken seriously. Closing this digital safety gap is the focus of the Sunlight AfA. Comprising 48 members, the AfA is organised into five workstreams – first, public education through campaigns, workshops and resources to raise awareness; second, victim support and providing needed psychological and legal aid; third, youth engagement to galvanise the energy of our young and champion campus advocacy; fourth, research to better understand and track how we are doing and monitor trends; and finally, volunteerism to bring members of the community together in active ways.
7. Each workstream is in the midst of identifying and affirming projects that they wish to work on for the 12-month duration of the AfA. We look forward to sharing more about the progress of specific projects in the months to come.



The Solutions We Need To Close The Digital Gap

8. The advent and proliferation of online harms is one of the many issues that the Government cannot solve alone. I am grateful to the 48 members of the AfA, men and women who stepped forward as partners, and to all of you in this hackathon who have come together to tackle online harms.

9. As digitalisation accelerates in Singapore, we need this wider, cross-cutting network of partners to co-create solutions, and to do so quickly. If we do not act to create a culture that is more supportive and respectful of women, women will lose confidence to navigate digital spaces freely and safely. Over time, they will be left out of the opportunities presented in our increasingly digital world.

10. Design-based solutioning to formulate strategies will make a difference in closing the digital safety gap for women and girls. We also need more hands on deck to create the support infrastructure needed for victims of online harms.

11. This community hackathon brings both innovation and law together to address some of these needs through the problem statements posed to you. I am hopeful that your pitches will also translate into real-world applications which can make a difference to the community. I thank DBS and the Singapore Judiciary for bringing together the ideas and expertise of legal professionals, law students, public officers and DBS employees to join us in this meaningful partnership.

12. In previous rounds, teams have shown great ingenuity and creativity in their submissions. Some proposed how to enhance the victim support journey by bringing legal and non-legal information and support services together in a one-stop platform. Others suggested leveraging technology to proactively identify and remove online harms to protect potential victims using AI and machine learning. Still others pitched ways to raise public awareness, prompt changes in societal attitudes and educate the public across age groups. These are just some of the good ideas put forth so far.

13. We have all seen and understood how harmful these online threats are. But perhaps this experience has also shown you the potential of what can be achieved when we work together to address the digital challenges of our community.

14. I look forward to hearing more from your presentations today and learning from all of you. I wish you all the best.

