

Opening Remarks by Mr Tan Kiat How, Minister of State for Communications & Information & Chairman of National Translation Committee on 10 November 2021, 7.35PM

Mr Vikram Nair,
Members of the National Translation Committee and the Language Resource Panels,
Citizen Translators,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good evening. Thank you for joining us this evening.
2. Since I took over as the NTC chairperson in May, I've heard a lot about the good work that the Citizen Translators (CTs) have done under the leadership of the former chairperson Senior Minister of State Sim Ann, and I am very happy to work with you to improve our translation standards.

Acknowledging CTs' contributions

3. Earlier this year, the NTC Secretariat held a naming contest for you to choose a new name for the Citizen Translators Project. I was delighted to know that many CTs responded enthusiastically and eagerly to share your suggestions and vote for your preferred name. It showed your strong sense of ownership towards this project. In fact, we have very overwhelming response. Today, we have close to 800 CTs from secondary school students to seniors.
4. This sense of ownership also came through as I was briefed on the work done by the CTs so far. In July this year, the Secretariat had sought your feedback on the translations on the Token Go Where microsite. This microsite provides important information for our fellow Singaporeans on the collection and replacement venues for TraceTogether tokens, which is important to our efforts in fighting Covid-19. Your response was overwhelming, and we received more than 600 pieces of feedback within two weeks. The Secretariat has consolidated your suggestions and shared them with the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office (SNDGO). SNDGO will be going through your suggestions and update the translations wherever appropriate.
5. There could be more avenues for you to continue to contribute soon, as the Secretariat has been exploring new collaborations with other Government agencies. Recently, we started a pilot project with the People's Association for CTs to provide suggestions to translations on materials such as posters, banners, and leaflets, in the various divisions, starting with Kampong Chai Chee and Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng constituencies. Once the materials are ready, we will be seeking your feedback. I am heartened that CTs have responded eagerly for the first exercise under this "partner a community" approach. I hope that you will continue to support this initiative and help us improve the translated communications materials as we extend this pilot to other grassroots divisions and other projects to benefit more Singaporeans.

MOS's personal experience on the importance of translation

6. Translation is a vital means to help our people understand information from the Government. Speaking from my personal experience having previously worked in the Pioneer Generation Office a few years ago, we had to reach out to almost 500,000 seniors within two years to help them understand the Pioneer Generation Package and how it benefits them. Importantly, thanking them for their contributions in building up Singapore. For myself and the 3,000 volunteers involved, translation played a crucial role in our outreach effort, as many of our seniors prefer to communicate in their mother tongue – Chinese, Malay or Tamil. This is why we are devoting our efforts towards improving our translations in government communications, and this is where all of you can contribute too.

Vision for the new year

7. As we look forward to the new year, the direction for the Citizen Translators project remains unchanged. We hope you will continue to volunteer your time and expertise by coming forward with better suggestions for accurate and localised translations of government communication materials. Besides letting us know how we can do better, we hope you can also share with us areas that we have done well. Your encouragement will motivate government agencies and many of my colleagues to continue to do better.

New initiatives in the new year

8. Meanwhile, I am happy to announce two new initiatives this evening that we intend to roll out to enhance your volunteering journey with us.

9. At the Zoom session in January earlier this year, the NTC Secretariat mentioned that Citizen Translators will be able to do post-edit Government communication materials using the SG Translate Together web portal, or SGTT. The portal is currently in its beta phase and has been opened to a preliminary group to sign up as registered users. I am happy to share with you tonight that all Citizen Translators will be invited to become a user of this portal prior to the official launch. I hope you will all agree to sign up and contribute through this portal. We will share more information during the presentation later. Because there are so many of you, do give us some time to get in touch with you. You will receive an invitation by the end of next March.

10. Next, the Secretariat will be introducing a recognition and training framework for you. We value the time and effort that you take to give us your feedback and suggestions, and this is our small way of showing our deepest appreciation, while helping you develop your translation skills. The Secretariat will also share more details later during the presentation.

11. Through this new initiative, we not only hope to have your continued participation, but attract more like-minded and passionate volunteers to come onboard. Some of them are in fact here tonight. I hope that after this session, you too will join us in the Citizen Translators journey to improve overall translation standards.

12. For now, I look forward to an active discussion with all of you on how we can continue to raise translation standards and improve the CT project as well as any other feedback that you may have.

13. Thank you very much.