A real crisis.

It has been said that the earth is on loan to us by our children. We have not inherited the earth from our ancestors but rather have borrowed it from our children. All the more, we should take care of the earth we call home.

Yet, the world still faces an array of environmental challenges. Let me just cite some mind-boggling numbers that many of you will know well. 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, about two-thirds of these live in Asia. 2.6 billion people lack access to improved sanitation, more than two-thirds of these live in Asia. Almost two billion people were affected by natural disasters in the last decade of the 20th century.

In short, there is a real crisis out there; a crisis that somehow does not seem so real to many of us in wealthier countries. Perhaps we have simply become numb to a reality that has been there for too long. We are rightly scared about the bird flu, because it may hit us badly. But why then do we care less when 3.4 million
people, mostly children, die annually from water-related diseases? Perhaps because we know our children will not be among them.

I was shocked when I recently found out that millions of children, mostly girls drop out of school because many have to travel long distances to carry water back home. This is quite unimaginable for us urbanites in Singapore.

*We can and must do something about it ..... together.*

Even as we know these problems, we may despair and say that we can’t do anything about it. The problem is simply too big to tackle. And the less sympathetic ones in our societies might even ask are these people worth saving? Thankfully, this evening, I am speaking to the converted and environmental leaders who have worked tirelessly to prove these notions wrong.

We at Lien Foundation are novices in this field and are truly privileged to be able to learn from the shining examples of the Champions of the Earth award winners. But we have also learnt that individually, the goal of environmentally sustainable development cannot be achieved alone because preserving our environment is, and must be, a collective effort and responsibility.

The Lien Foundation is proud to be part of this collective effort to promote environmental ownership. Dr Su has already mentioned that we, together with the Nanyang Technological University will be launching the Lien Foundation -
NTU Environmental Endeavour. We hope that this platform will foster greater collaborations amongst like-minded organizations and individuals to capitalize on existing technologies for every day challenges in developing communities in Asia.

And it is my hope that maybe through our joint efforts, we could inspire a next generation of active, environmentally conscious global citizens. The time for renewed action is now. Not individual action, but in partnership. Not ad hoc action, but a continual effort.

Let me end with a plea – let us not disappoint our children…. when we return this borrowed earth to them. With that, I thank you and wish you a pleasant evening.