Media Release
Information to be embargoed till 27 August, 4pm

COMMEMORATING THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II AND THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE, 27 August 2015 – On 15 August 1945, the Japanese Emperor announced the surrender of the Japanese forces. In Singapore, news of the surrender was only mentioned in the official newspaper on 21 August. On 12 September 1945, a surrender ceremony was held at the then-Municipal Building (present day National Gallery Singapore), where Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, accepted the surrender of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia. This took place in what is today known as the City Hall Chamber. It signalled the official end of the three and a half years of Japanese Occupation in Singapore.

2. 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. In commemoration of this milestone in history, the National Heritage Board (NHB) organised a ceremony in the same City Hall Chamber where the 1945 surrender ceremony took place. The event, officiated by Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, was attended by war survivors and veterans, members of the Singapore Armed Forces Veterans League (SAFVL), the diplomatic corps, Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), representatives from the business and community groups, and National Cadet Corps. It was held to honour the sacrifice, resilience and unity of those who survived the war, and rebuilt Singapore in the post-war period, laying the foundation for the nation of today.

3. Minister Lawrence Wong said: “Through courage and resilience, our pioneers paved the way after the war towards building a nation. We must never forget their values, sacrifices and efforts. This chapter in Singapore’s history also reminds us that we must never take things for granted, and that we each have a responsibility for Singapore’s sovereignty. By staying united as Singaporeans, we will be able to safeguard our future together”.

4. At the ceremony, two survivors of the war recounted their memories of life during the Japanese Occupation. Established Singapore writer and Cultural Medallion recipient Professor Edwin Thumboo read a poem that he had written on growing up during the war, entitled 1st April ’45, 42 Monk’s Hill Terrace; while retired army major, Major (Retired) Ishwar Lall Singh, spoke of how his experience during the war years led him to volunteer as a soldier in the post-war era. The event was also attended by religious leaders of the IRO who offered silent prayers for the victims of the war and for peace.

5. Major (Retired) Ishwar Lall Singh, a member of the Singapore Armed Forces Veterans League (SAFVL), who spoke at the ceremony, added, “I was a teenager
during the Occupation, and towards the end of the war, was sent to work with the Indian National Army. I witnessed, and also experienced, much hardship then. After the war, I decided to enlist as a volunteer for the defence of Singapore, and subsequently joined the Singapore Armed Forces, to defend my home and family, and never again have to see my fellow countrymen undergo such suffering in war.”

6. For more details on World War II and the Japanese Occupation, please refer to the following annexes:

Annex A: About World War II and the Japanese Occupation in Singapore
Annex B: About the City Hall Chamber

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About the National Heritage Board
The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. Its mission is to foster nationhood, promote identity building, and champion the development of a vibrant cultural and heritage sector in Singapore. As the custodian of Singapore’s heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans through a shared experience. NHB manages the national museums, community heritage institutions, Heritage Conservation Centre, Preservation of Monuments Board and the Language Councils Secretariat. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.
Annex A

About World War II and the Japanese Occupation in Singapore

World War II was a global conflict that lasted from 1939 to 1945. On 8 December 1941, the Japanese bombed Singapore and after fighting down the Malaya Peninsular, they invaded Singapore on 8 February 1942. The Japanese forces landed on the North-western part of Singapore in a coordinated assault at Lim Chu Kang, Sarimbun and Kranji. The defending British and Australian forces were led by Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival. Despite fierce resistance from the defenders, the Japanese fought their way towards Singapore city. The British surrendered on 15 February 1942.

This began the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, a tumultuous period of Singapore’s history, lasting more than three and half years. The local population and prisoners of war suffered and endured a dire lack of food, clean water and medical supplies. Their experiences and memories would profoundly shape Singapore’s identity after the war.

On 15 August 1945, the Japanese Emperor announced the surrender of all Japanese forces. On 12 September 1945, a surrender ceremony was held at the then-Municipal Building (which later became City Hall and presently houses the National Gallery Singapore) in Singapore. Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, accepted the surrender of all Japanese forces in Southeast Asia at the City Hall Chamber. The surrender ceremony marked the official end of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore and the end of World War II in the South East Asia.
Annex B

About the City Hall Chamber

The City Hall building (now part of the National Gallery Singapore) was completed in 1929 and was originally named the Municipal Building to house the Municipal Council and its various departments. The council oversaw the maintenance of public infrastructure and the provision of water, electricity and gas in Singapore. It was renamed City Hall in 1951, when Singapore was conferred the status of a City, and was subsequently used as government offices and the chambers of the High Court before undergoing alteration works from 2011 to 2015 to become the new National Gallery Singapore.

The City Hall Chamber, which is located within the Municipal Building, was previously named the Board Room as it was often used by Municipal Councillors to discuss matters pertaining to Singapore’s development. It was the grandest room in Singapore at that time, with its decorative ceiling and marble columns capped with brass Corinthian capitals.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Municipal Building was used as the Syonan Municipality. The surrender ceremony of the Japanese on 12 September 1945 was held at the Board Room, as the Municipal Building was a symbol of British power. It was in this room where General Seishiro Itagaki signed 11 copies of the surrender document that formally concluded the surrender of all Japanese military in Southeast Asia.