



## **POST-EVENT NEWS RELEASE**

For immediate release

### **GEORGE TOWN, MALAYSIA TAKES FIRST PLACE AT THE CLIMATHON GLOBAL AWARDS 2020**

PARIS, 31 January, 2020 - Malaysia was awarded the city winner of the inaugural Global Climathon Awards at the ChangeNOW Summit in Paris, France. The winning nature-based climate adaptation plan was co-presented by the Penang Island City Council (MBPP) and Think City, a social purpose urban rejuvenation organisation. The project will receive technical support as well as a cash prize of EUR 60,000.00.

The Climathon Global Awards, which recognises creativity and leadership solutions-thinking in response to local climate challenges, was held by European knowledge and innovation community, EIT Climate-KIC, in partnership with the Crowther Lab, a global-scale ecology research lab, and Swiss non-profit foundation, ETH Zurich. The Award featured a total of 10 citizens and five cities. George Town was one of the five city finalists, alongside Dublin (Ireland), Salvador (Brazil), Khartoum (Sudan), and Miami (United States of America).

Sofia Castelo, senior manager of Think City, said: "It's incredibly exciting and an honour for Penang to be the first city winner of the Global Climathon Awards.

"There are places in the world where the climate in 2050 will be vastly different from what it is today and George Town is one of these cities – this is the challenge."

"We believe that our nature-based approach can make a real difference to the lives of Penangites, who are already regularly suffering the impacts of extreme weather, including flooding, heat stroke and heat stress.

"Our research will begin with climate-resilient species of trees that can help cool our communities and prevent flooding, and we also hope to raise awareness and increase understanding that climate change impacts have to be tackled in the hearts of our cities," she said.

## The Penang Challenge

In their submission, the winning team dealt with inherent characteristics prevalent in Penang.

Located in the Malacca Strait in Northwestern Malaysia, just five degrees north of the equator, the island of Penang is particularly vulnerable to climate impact due to its location and stage of development. Expected impact to Malaysia include increases in temperature, extreme weather events and sea level rise, with the country now facing uniformly high temperatures and humidity throughout the year.

The impact of temperature rise in Malaysia will be felt the most in cities, like Penang, due to urban heat island effect, a phenomenon of warmer temperatures resulting from human activity in metropolitan areas. This is estimated to have had spin-off effects on public health. Yet, the impact has thus far not been quantified as hospitals in Malaysia do not identify heat stress or heat stroke, but instead register these health impacts as being of respiratory or of a cardiac nature.

Changes in weather patterns have also been taking place, with an increase of 15% in total rainfall in the past 40 years. In November 2017, the heaviest rainfall registered in Penang's history led to flooding of urban areas, causing the loss of 7 lives and more than MYR 1 billion in damages. Increased rainfall combined with higher temperatures is also expected to increase cases of vector borne diseases such as dengue.

## The Solution

The Nature-based climate adaptation programme for the urban areas of Penang island devised by the winning team, aims to reduce climate change impacts on infrastructure and property, and threats to human life, while strengthening social and institutional resilience. To meet these targets, the team proposed solutions in the following key areas:

- Heat stress  
A range of green elements, such as street trees, rooftop gardens, pocket parks and blue-green corridors will be introduced to help reduce the urban heat island effect. The programme also includes a pilot project in a local hospital to identify and code heat stress and heat stroke.
- A study will also be carried out on climate-resilient urban tree species for Malaysia in collaboration with the National Landscape Institute and local experts. The goal is to select a range of street tree species which will be able to withstand, and hopefully thrive, in the coming climate.
- Flooding  
The programme will implement nature-based solutions that reduce surface temperatures and stormwater runoff. Upstream areas that are more heavily pressured hydrologically will be identified and converted into spaces that store water. Swales and infiltration wells will be introduced to reduce the impacts of increased rainfall.

- A Smart Flood Management System, proposed by winners in the individual category of Climathon Penang 2019, will also be tested as a pilot project in the programme.
- Social Resilience  
A women and girls programme will aim to reduce gender vulnerability. Women and girls will be given specific tools to overcome challenges of being caregivers of both the children and the elderly of the family, in case of extreme weather events. The programme will also promote women's participation in decision-making processes.

## **The Benefits**

Impacts of the project include reduced energy consumption due to air conditioning needs, carbon sequestration due to nature-based solutions, and an improved microclimate which contributes to an increased uptake of cycling and walking over driving. Reduced impact on human health (heat stress and vector borne diseases), crop yields, ecosystem health, strengthened social resilience and reduced vulnerability within communities are also expected.

The project will be assessed through the remote sensing of surface temperatures and data collection via local meteorology stations, all made available online via the remote knowledge transfer platform, and supplemented by studies on public health.

The goal is that after 6-8 years of completion (planned for 2025), temperatures will be reduced by approximately 1.5 degrees Celsius in all urban areas and 5-7 degrees Celsius in shaded areas. Stormwater management is also expected to be improved, substantially reducing flood risks.

The programme's comprehensive approach, in which a diversified set of components (i.e. urban greening, urban agriculture, public health) is implemented in Penang's urban areas acknowledges the complexity and interrelation of the multiple coexisting environmental and social dimensions of climate change. It is meant to be developed as a pilot project which can then be scaled to include other cities in Malaysia.

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## About Think City

Think City is a social purpose organisation dedicated to making cities people-friendly and resilient by being a catalyst for change in the way cities are planned, curated, developed and celebrated. As a regional citymaking agency, Think City provides urban policy thinking, management and implementation of urban solutions in Southeast Asia and beyond. Established in 2009 to spearhead urban regeneration in George Town, their impact and successes have led to expansion into Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru. Adopting a community-first, evidence-based approach, Think City focuses on four main communities of practice: Placemaking, Resilience, Analytics and Conservation. Owing to their position as a neutral party,

Think City has enabled synergies between the public and private sectors, the community and international partners. Together, they work to implement projects that enhance the arts, heritage, culture, environment, economy and resilience of cities in the Asean region. Think City is celebrating their 10th Anniversary with a year-long programme of events and projects. For more, see [thinkcity.com.my](http://thinkcity.com.my).

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