

**REMARKS BY MDM HALIMAH YACOB, NTUC ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL, LAUNCH OF SINGAPORE COMPACT, 26 JAN 2005, 9:30AM, DBS AUDITORIUM, SINGAPORE**

Guest-of-Honour Mr Heng Chee How, Minister of State for Trade and Industry,

Dr Richard Leete, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
Resident Representative of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei

Distinguished guests, fellow comrades, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

Today's launch of this Singapore Compact for CSR society is an important milestone in the promotion of the CSR initiative in Singapore.

**1. CSR in Spirit & Practice Not New to Singapore**

1.1 CSR is generally understood to be the way company achieves an integration of economic, environmental and social objectives while at the same time address expectations of various stakeholders with sustainable development.

1.2 While the concept itself may be relatively new to some in Singapore, its spirit and practices have been present in the social, environmental and economic fabric of Singapore. The strong tripartism that exists in Singapore has provided a solid foundation for the development of various CSR initiatives. CSR in particular is relevant to the labour movement with ongoing initiatives in strengthening existing efforts.

**2. Ongoing Efforts from the Labour Movement**

2.1 A core element of corporate social responsibility is the observance of good labour standards, which the labour movement in Singapore has been actively involved. Through our participation in tripartism and social dialogue, unions have been able to secure substantial improvements in workers lives with better workplace practices, employability and job creation.

2.2 Unions in Singapore have continued to play a significant role in pushing for good CSR practices and standards. Recent priorities include the push for wage restructuring and job redesign, to better motivate workers with greater profit sharing and to minimise hardship arising from possible retrenchment.

2.3 The labour movement has also been advocating for enhancements to the social safety nets and the implementation of portable medical benefits, individual savings and learning accounts in improving workers' employability. The above efforts are in line with the framework of CSR as the labour movement aims to build a better life for workers and their families.

### **3. Contribution & Role of NTUC Cooperatives**

3.1 In Singapore, CSR is strongly promoted through the NTUC cooperatives. The setting up of NTUC cooperative is aimed at improving the social and economic well-being of our workers. Through its nine cooperatives, the NTUC has played an important and direct role in helping workers stretch their hard-earned dollar by moderating the cost of goods and services for essential necessities such as food, health and dental care, insurance and childcare.

3.2 The NTUC cooperatives have been active and contributing to CSR efforts through direct donations and support for community projects. For example, the NTUC Fairprice has been described as a supermarket with a heart. Among several initiatives, Fairprice collaborated with grassroots organisations to launch a Million Dollar Food Voucher scheme to assist low-income needy families all over Singapore and continued to organise its annual Used Textbooks Project to benefit needy students for the 21<sup>st</sup> year.

3.3 The NTUC Income also set aside about 1% of its annual surplus towards community contributions, supporting programmes in the area of charity, education, arts, sports and health lifestyle with ongoing efforts.

3.4 CSR is embedded in the mission of all the NTUC cooperatives. Many NTUC-affiliate unions also operate workers' cooperatives and most provide welfare schemes to union members and their families such as hardship grants, scholarship and bursaries for needy children.

3.5 Over the years, NTUC cooperatives have remained committed to their social objectives while maximizing stakeholders' value, as an effective and sustainable business model. It is notable that all the nine cooperatives have come forward to join the Singapore Compact at the onset, as a show of their strong support towards the CSR movement in Singapore.

### **4. Corporate Citizenship with the Tsunami Disaster**

4.1 Exactly one month ago this morning, a major earthquake hit northwestern Sumatra, resulting in tidal waves with devastating effect across the region. We know that the calamity still poses severe challenge for the affected countries and communities.

4.2 While no amount of contributions and aids can easily relieve the pain and trauma of the victims, the reconstruction and rehabilitation tasks have in some ways been made less daunting by the unprecedented pledges of aid, not least from the corporate community.

4.3 It has been said that the most trying of times bring out the best in the human spirit. The plight of the Tsunami victims has touched a deep chord among Singaporeans. We share a common humanity with those who have been hit and shown enormous capacity to care and respond as one nation. The experience has also drawn Singaporeans closer as a caring people, with a greater sense of compassion, generosity and maturity.

4.4 As we remember the Tsunami tragedy, let us also reflect on how we can continue to rekindle our community spirit and build on the social consciousness and self-sacrificing character we have developed, towards our neighbours as well as the less fortunate and needy in our society. In moving forward, it is also meaningful for us to raise further awareness and strengthen ongoing efforts towards volunteerism and CSR in the workplace.

4.5 The founding of the Singapore Compact society is indeed an important and positive step towards this direction.

## **5. Conclusion - Join the Singapore Compact**

5.1 CSR is crucial for the achievement of sustainable and fair economic development. It is a multi-faceted movement needing many supportive stakeholders, and has to start from the workplace, with unions, employers and government having key roles to play. The tripartite partners in Singapore are key stakeholders and have important roles to play in bringing the CSR movement forward for sustainable and effective implementation.

5.2 We strongly believe in the positive role that employers can play in contributing and improving the quality of life of its employees and their families, as well as the local community. We urge companies to adopt good CSR practices and hope that more like-minded stakeholders will join the Singapore Compact as a national platform, in promoting and strengthening existing efforts.

Thank you.

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