

REMARKS BY MR GAN KIM YONG
MINISTER FOR MANPOWER, SINGAPORE
AT THE 2ND ASEAN HUMAN RESOURCE CONFERENCE 2010
10.00AM, 25 MAY 2010 (TUE), HANOI, VIETNAM

Her Excellency Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, Minister of Labour, Invalids and
Social Affairs, Vietnam

Fellow ASEAN Labour Ministers

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1 I am pleased to be here at the 2nd ASEAN HR Conference and I congratulate Vietnam for putting together an excellent programme. It has been two years since the first ASEAN Human Resource Summit which Singapore hosted. It was at a time when the global financial crisis was just beginning to unfold. The Conference provided a useful platform for delegates to share their views on managing human resources in a crisis. It offered much insight on strategies to retain and develop talent, even in a recession. Today, we meet in a much happier mood. ASEAN as a whole is recovering from the downturn. The labour market and hiring sentiments

are improving. Many businesses are increasingly shifting their focus from surviving to growing. I applaud Vietnam's initiative to organise the second ASEAN HR Conference as a follow-up to the first Conference in Singapore. The theme of this year's Conference – Human Resource for Economic Recovery and Development – is therefore an appropriate and timely one.

Towards productivity-driven growth

2 As we look to the future, Singapore will be focusing on enhancing labour productivity, for which workforce skills development will be a key dimension. During the downturn, Singapore set up a high level committee with representatives from the government, businesses and the unions to review our long-term economic strategies. The government has accepted the recommendations of the Committee to make a strategic shift to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth through productivity and innovation. To improve incomes and achieve a higher standard of living, we target to raise productivity by 2 to 3 percent each year for the next decade. This will require a concerted tripartite effort involving employers, workers and the Government. We have established a National Productivity and Continuing Education Council (NPCEC) to prioritise and champion national productivity initiatives at the sectoral and enterprise levels, develop a comprehensive first-class national Continuing Education and Training

(CET) system, and foster a culture of productivity and continuous learning in Singapore.

CET as a national priority

3 A skilled and productive workforce is one critical advantage which companies must have in order to compete. Having relevant skills for new industries and evolving jobs is also the worker's best assurance to staying employed and advancing in their careers. In today's fast-changing landscape, technology evolves rapidly. Skills and qualifications will lose relevance very quickly so life-long learning has become necessary. Singapore will build up a comprehensive CET system to provide more opportunities for our workers to upgrade their skills.

4 For the first time, we are building two national CET campuses, which will serve as focal points for our working adults to acquire new skills for the fast-evolving economy. To be completed by 2013, they will serve as key gateways for our workers to upgrade their skills, and for our employers to partner with reputable training providers to meet the training needs of their workforce. The campuses will bring together integrated facilities for employers and workers, including training centres, facilities for job fairs, career workshops as well as career services.

Addressing the issues of an ageing workforce

5 Singapore will be tapping on older workers to ensure that we have a sustainable workforce. In just 10 years' time by 2020, one in six Singapore residents will be 65 years or older compared to one in nine today. Singapore must maximise the potential of our human resources by retaining the experience and abilities of older workers, and encouraging more women to join the workforce. At present, our statutory retirement age is 62 years. Rather than raising the retirement age, we have chosen to legislate re-employment beyond retirement age so as to give flexibility to employers in their manpower planning and deployment. Under this arrangement, employers can retain their valued older employees by offering them a different job based on their manpower needs at a different salary and employment terms based on the value of the job and the contribution of the individual employee. We are now helping companies and workers to be re-employment ready when the legislation takes effect in 2012.

6 We will help older low-wage workers through our Workfare scheme, which rewards work by supplementing workers' incomes. To ensure that these lower-skilled workers will also upgrade their skills and improve their

productivity, we are introducing a new Workfare Training Scheme in July this year, to encourage older low-wage workers to go for training and upgrade themselves, and to motivate their employers to send them for training.

Conclusion

7 As ASEAN recovers from the global financial crisis and economic downturn, we should be ready to tap on the strong growth potential of Asia. At the same time, we need to be more resilient against future shocks which the global financial system and economy will face from time to time. This Conference on “Human Resource for Economic Recovery and Development” will enable ASEAN countries to learn from each other’s experiences in managing the downturn, and discuss how we are preparing for future growth. It will also provide an opportunity to share progressive HR practices which will help enhance our labour market competitiveness, and the overall investment climate in ASEAN. This will in turn help to bring about sustained economic growth and job creation for the benefit of the whole region.

8 In closing, I would like to thank Vietnam once again for hosting this conference and for inviting us to participate in the event. I am confident we will have a successful and fruitful conference. Thank you.

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