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**SPEECH BY MR LEE YI SHYAN
MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRADE & INDUSTRY AND MANPOWER
AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF
THE SINGAPORE WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH CONFERENCE,
ON 16 SEPTEMBER, 5.30 PM, AT SUNTEC SINGAPORE**

My fellow Parliamentary colleagues

Distinguished speakers, delegates and guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

A very good evening to all of you. This inaugural Singapore Workplace Safety and Health Conference is drawing to a close. We have covered much ground over the last two days – about workplace safety and health trends, experiences, innovations and good practices from different countries and sectors.

2 Workplace accidents are costly to businesses. The General Insurance Association of Singapore highlighted that work injury compensation claims amounted to more than \$170 million in 2009, or nearly half a million dollars daily. Here in Singapore, it is estimated that 700,000 mandays are lost due to workplace incidents. This is equivalent to having a workforce of 2,300 full-time employees sitting idle for the whole year.

3. Besides financial and reputational damages, workplace incidents could also mean the loss of lives. Severe injuries and fatalities rob families of breadwinners, close relatives, and loved ones. Companies which do not endeavor to provide the safest of working environments cannot speak of their commitment to the well-being of their workers.

4. It is with this moral and professional imperative that the Conference's theme "Embracing Challenges, and Pushing WSH Frontiers" was formulated. We want to mobilise all stakeholders to make safety standards and prevention of workplace accidents their top priority. We have had great discussions in the past two days. I would like to emphasise three points from the discussions and highlight the way forward.

Leadership, Partnership, Ownership

5. First, leadership. Until workplace safety and health discussions enter the boardroom, we will not have the leadership commitment that is needed to drive a strong culture and practice of WSH in any company. WSH discipline has to come from the top, but cannot remain at the top. It has to percolate down to every management and supervisory layer - from boardroom to shop-floor to worksite.

6. Our Commissioner for WSH, Mr Ho Siong Hin, spoke about leadership by example. Leaders need to inspire, enthuse and lead WSH initiatives. Mr Choo Chiau Beng, Mr Philco Wong and Mr John Spanswick, explained how they led their respective

organizations in pursuit of WSH excellence. When managers and supervisors see their leaders in action, they will follow suit and contribute to building the WSH culture at the workplace.

7. Second, partnership. As highlighted by Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Hawazi Diapi, we can regulate, promote, and facilitate the building of WSH culture at the national level. But this alone is not enough. CEOs and employers are on the ground, and they would know their industries' WSH requirements. Likewise, managers and supervisors are on site, and they would know the best way to interpret WSH requirements and enforce them. We therefore need to enlist everyone's help, and work in unison and in support of each other. It is true that we need strong partnership in Singapore, like it is needed elsewhere. Dr Johari, Mrs Erika Hui and Ms Maureen Shaw have shared on how the close engagement of stakeholders in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Canada had similarly been instrumental in building safer workplaces.

8. Third, ownership. Yesterday, Senior Minister Jayakumar spoke about the initiatives Singapore has taken to improve WSH practices, including legislative reform, capability building and outreach programmes. These initiatives will become much more effective if they are adopted and owned by all stakeholders. As illustrated by Mr Karthikeyna Krishnamurthy in the last plenary session, our unions and workers have taken upon themselves to create and strengthen a strong safety culture at every level. Mr Frederick Wong, Mr Tan Pheng Hock, Mr Chia Ngiang Hong and Mr Elvin Koh, represent exemplary employers which have developed their own WSH policies and

practices, and have gone to great lengths to internalise them in the day-to-day operations.

Embracing Challenges, Pushing Frontiers

9. Our national WSH strategy – the WSH 2018 – is founded on these 3 principles of Leadership, Partnership and Ownership. The WSH 2018 defines the roadmap for Singapore to achieving one of the safest workplaces in the world. It calls on industry and other stakeholders to work together and take ownership, in order to improve safety outcomes.

10. Our initial efforts have helped to reduce Singapore's workplace fatality rate by 40% from 2004 to last year. We are on track to meeting our WSH 2018 target of 1.8 fatality per 100,000 workers. But we can do better. We need to ensure that WSH discipline and culture are deeply ingrained in our workplaces.

11. To inculcate the right attitudes and mindsets, the WSH Council is rolling out a Culture Building Programme, including the development of a WSH Culture Model and measurement Index. We have briefly explained how the Culture Model and Index would help companies build up a strong safety culture. More information will be shared by the WSH Council at a later stage on the implementation details and assistance programmes.

12. My Ministry will also extend the WSH Act to all workplaces by September 2011, underscoring our commitment to protect all employees at their workplaces. We will encourage and support all employers and unions in WSH outreach and education, until every worker knows and practices WSH discipline. It will be an unequivocal commitment to WSH best practices if an employer, on the first hour of the orientation for new staff, chooses to talk about WSH measures and requirements before everything else of the company.

Closing

13. In closing this Conference, it remains for me to thank all the speakers, penalists and moderators for their generous and insightful sharing. I would like to take the opportunity to thank our employers, unions and sponsors for their unwavering support and partnership. My thanks also goes to the organising committee of this inaugural conference for a job well done! Finally, let me thank you all for being such wonderful participants. While this Conference is drawing to an end, our work, inspired and energised, is just beginning. Let us work together towards achieving safer workplaces.

14. Thank you.