

**OPENING SPEECH BY 2ND MINISTER MRS JOSEPHINE TEO AT TAFEP'S
CONFERENCE ON FAIR AND PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES 2018
AT 9.15AM ON 27 APRIL 2018 AT STAMFORD BALLROOM, FAIRMONT HOTEL**

Sister Mary Liew, President, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC);
Brother Heng Chee How, Deputy-Sec Gen, NTUC and TAFEP Co-Chair;
Brother Douglas Foo, Vice President, SNEF and TAFEP Co-Chair;
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

1. Thank you for inviting me to join you at this Conference.
2. Coincidentally, the Conference comes just a few days before May Day.
3. It is interesting to consider how the occasion is marked in other countries.
4. But first, a bit of history which some may not be so familiar with.
5. May Day's origins go back to 1886, more than 130 years ago.
6. More than 200,000 people across the US took part in a demonstration, fighting for the eight-hour workday.
7. A bomb exploded. Many were wounded and several people lost their lives.
8. Given this violent origin, perhaps it is not surprising that in some countries, mass demonstrations are still held in conjunction with May Day.
9. Take for example, as recently as 2016. Tens of thousands of workers took part in May Day protests.
10. In France, there were protests against labour reforms that actually aimed to reduce chronic high unemployment.
11. In South Korea, protesters called for a higher minimum wage.

12. In Istanbul, Turkey, security measures included placing 25,000 police officers on duty.
13. In Singapore, our May Day tradition is for tripartite partners to come together for a Rally.
14. It is peaceful; not an occasion to quarrel but to celebrate our shared successes, acknowledge our shared challenges and renew our shared commitment to progress together.
15. One good example is how, as tripartite partners, we tackled the challenges faced by low-wage workers (LWWs).
16. In 2007, the Government introduced the Workfare Income Supplement to help LWWs bring home more and also save more for retirement.
17. In 2011, as a labour MP on the backbench, I moved a motion in Parliament which affirmed “the House’s commitment to inclusive economic growth, and called on the Government to continue doing more to support LWWs so that all Singaporeans may share the fruits of our prosperity through better skills, better jobs and better incomes.”.
18. Labour MP Mayor Desmond Choo was my staff at the time and helped formulate our position on Minimum Wage.
19. Instead of a minimum wage, the Labour Movement under the leadership of then Sec-Gen NTUC, Minister Lim Swee Say, introduced the Progressive Wage Model (PWM).
20. In PWM, a worker can earn higher wages by doing a bigger job which requires better skills and delivers higher productivity.
21. There is a ladder, rather than just a floor which is what a minimum wage provides.

22. Employers were prepared to accept PWM as a reasonable way for LWWs to progress in their jobs, while contributing to business success.
23. It is pro-worker in a pro-business way. It is also fair in a progressive way.
24. Today, tripartite partners have implemented the PWM in the cleaning, security and landscape sectors.
25. More than 70,000 resident workers are enabled in these sectors to experience better career progression and earn higher wages in a sustainable way.
26. This shows that there is a viable alternative to minimum wage that works!

Fairness and Progressiveness through Tripartism: TAFEP's dual roles

27. Tripartism, the Singapore way, has also helped us improve employment protection for our workers and promote fairer and more progressive workplaces.
28. The tripartite partners set up the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) in 2006.
29. We recognised that legislation alone was insufficient.
30. Two other important functions – enforcement and public education – must also be stepped up.
31. On enforcement, TAFEP investigates workplace discrimination complaints, where employers may have breached the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEPP).
32. Where breaches are confirmed, TAFEP reports these employers to MOM.
33. MOM in turn, imposes sanctions such as stern warnings and curtailment of work pass privileges.

33. On public education, TAFEP actively corrects stereotypes, for example, about older workers and women.
34. TAFEP also educates employers and uplifts their employment practices through training, as well as works with employers to put in place fair and inclusive workplace practices.
35. TAFEP has also stepped up its programmes for public outreach including road shows, broadcast and social media.
36. Over 5,000 employers have signed the Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment practices.
37. Over 8,000 HR practitioners, line managers and senior managers have been trained in our TAFEP workshops since 2007.
38. Having sustained our efforts for more than a decade, there is now greater awareness of TAFEP's advocacy and good results.
39. The number of enquiries and feedback to TAFEP have grown significantly in the past decade.

40. Supported by good policies and programmes, full-time employment rates of our women and older workers are high, even when compared to the 35 OECD countries.

41. This is despite the fact that we do not have specific anti-discrimination legislation for women or older workers. And if you compare our employment rates to other countries that do have such specific anti-discrimination legislation, actually, our employment rates are higher.

Responding to the challenges of our time

42. But our understanding of fairness and progressiveness cannot be static.
43. Every generation has different aspirations and faces fresh challenges.
44. So too must Tafep's programmes and emphasis evolve.
45. We need to keep adjusting, to sharpen our focus on what is most relevant to the times.
46. What are these?
47. In terms of an inclusive workforce, ageism is not fully eradicated.
48. The availability of quality part-time work or flexible work arrangements for women and other caregivers are still not widespread enough.
49. Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and ex-offenders can still be expanded.
50. In terms of progressive workplaces, workplace safety and health must be further improved.
51. HR practices need uplifting and employees want to be more meaningfully engaged.
52. But more than these, perhaps the biggest challenge of our time is the urgency for businesses to transform and workers to adapt.
53. The businesses know there is no time to lose and speed is of the essence for them to stay competitive.
54. Many workers too are aware that they should prepare, even if they are uncomfortable and anxious.

55. Against the backdrop of rapid change, what does fairness and progressiveness look like?
56. From an employer's point of view, will it be progressive if he is prevented from restructuring or innovating because it may displace workers?
57. From a worker's point of view, will it be fair if he is not given a chance to learn new skills and be part of the economy's transformation?
58. What is the new spirit of fairness and progressiveness that will enable businesses and workers move forward together, as we have done in the past?

Embrace a New Spirit of Fairness and Progressiveness: "Bring People Along"

59. We are beginning to see how some employers and workers are embracing a new spirit of fairness and progressiveness.

Ascenz Solutions Pte Ltd

60. Ascenz services the Maritime sector through its award-winning suite of cutting-edge IT and analytics solutions.

61. They achieved these accolades through a small team of 22 employees!

62. I first got to know them, when I was in MOT overseeing the Maritime sector. I spoke about the company's capability development efforts in last year's COS debate.

63. To survive, Ascenz needs to continually push out software products as the industry needs evolve.

64. Their software developers must have software development skills and yet be familiar with key maritime processes such as bunkering, fuel consumption, and emission compliance.
65. It is very hard to find people with both sets of skills.
66. To overcome the challenge, Ascenz worked with Workforce Singapore via the Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) for Software Developer.
67. Through the PCP, they were able to train and eventually hire several local PMETs.
68. But the remarkable thing for Ascenz was that they did not write-off applicants who were older.
69. Among them was 58 year-old Mr Tan who had been retrenched from an oil and gas company.
70. Through the PCP, he is now a System and Software Engineer with Ascenz.
71. He is regarded as a pillar in development of Ascenz's products, as he lends his MNC experience and approach to key processes such as documentation and internal software development.
72. With stricter regulations on fuel emissions, the Maritime community is increasingly adopting Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) as a greener fuel.
73. Ascenz is gearing up their employees to meet future demands for LNG monitoring and advisory solutions.
74. All employees will be equipped with a basic understanding of LNG's properties, LNG safety and operations, as well as handling of emergencies.

75. Regardless of age, as long as their employees are willing, they can be part of the company's continued growth.

Rohde & Schwarz Asia Pte Ltd

76. Rohde & Schwarz Asia prides themselves as a regional headquarters, based in Singapore.

77. They have well-established capabilities in R&D and production of measuring equipment used in wireless communications.

78. They also have a strong global presence, equipped with both local and regional expertise.

79. But things were different, when the company was set up in 1997. Back then, the only entity which had the R&D and manufacturing capability was its global headquarter in Munich.

80. Some years ago, the Singapore outfit began to envision themselves as a "Mini-Munich".

81. It would have been faster to "plug and play" with foreign experts, but that was not the choice they made.

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82. Instead, they mapped out a plan to uplift their local employees' skills.

83. Many batches of local engineers were sent to Munich to learn new skills and capabilities that were not available in Singapore.

84. These engineers helped the Singapore entity progressively develop and manufacture its own product lines. They were able to operate independently in Asia, without HQ support.

85. One such engineer is Mr Rajashekar Durai (Raja).

86. He learned state-of-the-art technical and development skills through intensive hands-on learning and mentoring by experts from the Radio Frequency (RF) product development teams.
87. The opportunities availed to Raja, allowed him to gain new knowledge and experience to contribute to his company's vision.
88. This led him to set up the first local R&D team specialising in Test & Measurements products.
89. The opportunities also allowed him to progress in his career. Today, he is the Director for Test and Measurement Products Division at the R&D Department.
90. As employees, Mr Tan and Raja were both displaced one way or the other.
91. Mr Tan actually lost his previous job and Raja may well have if he could not adapt to the company's vision for its Singapore business.
92. Both overcame personal and professional challenges to be part of a larger growth story with their companies.
93. At the same time, both Ascenz and Rohde & Schwarz Asia embody the new spirit of fairness and progressiveness among employers.
94. They gave Mr Tan and Raja a fair chance to progress with their companies as they transformed.
95. They "bring people along". It is this willingness to "bring people along" that we want to encourage.

Growing community of fair and progressive employers

96. This is why the tripartite partners have been growing the community of fair and progressive employers, under the Human Capital Partnership (HCP) programme which was launched in February 2017.
97. Our HCPartners have taken ambitious steps, beyond the basic requirements of sound HR practices.
98. They demonstrate and invest in fairness and progressiveness in many ways.
99. For example, they develop local employees across all levels, including older workers and low-wage workers.
100. They build stronger complementarity between local and foreign employees.
101. They also facilitate skills transfer from foreign experts to local employees to prepare their businesses and people for the future.

The HCP community is growing steadily

102. Today, we welcome our third batch of 87 HCPartners to our HCP community.
103. They come from a wide variety of sectors such as financial services, food services, health, manufacturing and professional services.
104. In fact, both Ascenz and Rohde & Schwarz Asia are part of this third batch.
105. What is different about this third batch?
106. Compared to previous batches, SMEs are a much bigger share - nearly 50% compared to 31%.
107. This is encouraging as it shows that SMEs too have the potential and capabilities to be exemplary fair and progressive employers.

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108. Together, we now have 221 HCPartners, about 3 times the number of HCPartners when we started last year.
109. They employ over 190,000 locals, which is about 8% of our total local workforce.
110. We hope to keep identifying more HCPartners and encourage other companies to model themselves after these exemplary leaders.

Support for employers who aspire to be fair and progressive but need more time to build their capabilities

111. For employers who need more time to build their HR capabilities, one way forward is to adopt the Tripartite Standards.
112. They were introduced last year to help employees and jobseekers identify companies with progressive employment practices.
113. These employers may not be perfect in every way, but they do have progressive employment practices that jobseekers should know about.
114. Since July 2017, seven Standards jointly developed by tripartite partners, have been launched.
115. The Standards cover term contract employment, flexible work arrangements, grievance handling, recruitment practices, to name a few.
116. Thanks to tripartite partners' and TAFEP's outreach and engagement efforts, over 850 employers have signed up to at least one of the seven Standards.
117. About 450,000 employees have benefited from their employers' progressive employment practices.

118. The tripartite partners are developing more Tripartite Standards to highlight concrete, actionable practices that employers can implement at their workplaces.

Launch of Tripartite Standard on Age-Friendly Workplace Practices

119. Today, I am pleased to introduce the eighth one – the Tripartite Standard on Age-Friendly Workplace Practices.

120. All employers should find this relevant. Faced with an aging population, we need to find more ways to unlock the potential of seniors in our workforce.

121. Not everyone of our seniors are ready to relax by the beach. They see their golden years as continuing to be part of a vibrant economy.

122. We should enable them to do so.

123. This new Standard is part of our wider efforts to build inclusive and ageless workplaces.

124. Progressive practices laid out in the Standard were developed to meet the specific concerns of older workers.

125. For example,

- Not using age as a selection criterion for recruitment;
- Addressing age discrimination at the hiring stage;
- Training older employees to perform their jobs effectively;
- Ensuring that employees stay productive and employable through continual upskilling and reskilling; and
- Designing jobs and workplaces to be age-friendly.

126. The new Standard will support older Singaporeans to work for as long as they are willing and able to, in jobs that are safer and smarter in a work environment where they feel valued and where their needs are addressed.
127. At the same time, employers benefit from their older employees' experience and continual productivity.
128. More than 160 employers, including those in the public service, have signed on to this Standard as early adopters. These employers hire about 200,000 workers.
129. Many came on board because they recognised that building inclusive, age-friendly workplaces made good business sense.

Conclusion

130. The strong spirit of tripartism in Singapore has served us well.
131. We will continue to strengthen tripartism in the years ahead to keep it relevant to the times.
132. The theme of today's Conference is "Investing in Our Human Capital to Co-create Business Success".
133. So, with our tripartite partners' support, we can create a virtuous cycle.
134. Where employers continually invest in their human capital and "bring people along" as they transform their businesses for greater success.
135. Where employees are equipped and motivated to help their employers scale greater heights.
136. Where the new spirit of fairness and progressiveness enables businesses and workers to keep moving forward and growing together!

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137. Happy May Day in advance!

138. Thank you.

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