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OPENING ADDRESS BY DR. JOHN CHEN

MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND

MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,

AT THE INTERNATIONAL OIL POLLUTION CONFERENCE

AND EXHIBITION (IOPCE 99)

1 SEPTEMBER 1999, 9.00 AM, ORCHARD HOTEL

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 Good morning and welcome to this year's International Oil Pollution Conference and Exhibition (IOPCE 99) organised by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore.

2 As you may be aware, Singapore is the world's busiest port and the top bunkering centre. Hence, the volume of maritime traffic at our doorstep is huge. Some 140,000 vessels called at our port last year. This has kept the waterways of both the Malacca and Singapore Straits, which lead to the Singapore port, perpetually busy.

3 Given this amount of traffic in relatively confined waters, we have always attached top

priority to navigational safety, not least because it is crucially linked to the prevention of oil

pollution incidents. The proper facilities, procedures and guidelines to prevent such incidents

must be in place, a task that the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, or MPA, takes

very seriously. One example is the use of IMO-approved Traffic Separation Schemes in the

Malacca and Singapore Straits that was implemented in co-operation with Malaysia and

Indonesia. We have also implemented the Mandatory Ship Reporting System in the Straits

since December 98, enabling shore-based authorities to advise transiting ships on the traffic

situation in the straits. It will also facilitate search and rescue operations. The Singapore

Electronic Navigation Chart (ENC), a digital database containing comprehensive nautical

chart information of the Singapore waters and its approaches, is another important

development to improve navigational safety. We would like to see a wider use of ENCs by

ships navigating in the Malacca and Singapore Straits.

4 However, we accept that no matter how much preventive work is done, the risk of an

oil pollution incident will always be there. I am reminded of the October 1997 collision

between two oil tankers, the "Orapin Global" and the "Evoikos", in the Straits of Singapore.

This incident fully tested Singapore's preparations and preparedness for an oil pollution

incident. Fortunately, we put our years of vigilant preparation to good use, cleaning up some

28,500 tonnes of spilled heavy fuel oil over three weeks, thus preventing an environmental

disaster.

5 Undoubtedly, oil pollution incidents are one of the most ecologically devastating

maritime accidents possible. Thus, I am delighted that today's International Oil Pollution

Conference and Exhibition will serve as an effective forum for various parties to share their

experiences and techniques in dealing with oil pollution. I understand that the IOPCE intends

to adopt a total approach that will cover the gamut of oil pollution topics. This will include

the IMO's views on marine pollution challenges, the impact of new international conventions,

the issue of claims and liabilities, technological developments and effective media

management, just to name a few.

6 Another area that is essential to the protection of the marine environment from

pollution is legislation. In 1971, Singapore enacted the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea

Act. This legislation was drawn up to prepare and respond to oil pollution incidents, to take

polluters to task, and to obtain compensation. The Act was updated in 1990 when we

acceded to the MARPOL 73/78 Convention Protocol of 1978 to the International Convention

for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973. In March 1999, we became a party to the

OPRC Convention – an International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response

and Co-operation. We have also acceded to the international conventions for oil pollution

claims that would increase available compensation amounts to meet cleanup costs and oil

pollution damage.

7 But as important as it is to have the proper laws and the will to wield the stick against

polluters, we must have the shipping and oil community's support and assistance in

protecting the marine environment. Seminars and international conferences, plus the sharing

of information on relevant subjects, including technological advances in oil pollution

combating techniques and equipment are useful avenues for co-operation. The IOPCE '99

has been organised with this in mind.

8 This gathering of experts also present us with an opportunity to jointly sponsor a

workshop with the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme

and the International Maritime Organisation. Its overall objective is to support the efforts of 11

participating governments of the East Asian Seas Region, including Singapore and Malaysia.

in the prevention and management of marine pollution at both the national and regional levels

on a long-term and self-reliant basis. for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pollution

in the East Asian Seas. Together with the IMO, Singapore would like to contribute to

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capacity building in this region with respect to maritime administration issues. To this end, we

have assembled twenty senior maritime and environment administrators from nine regional

countries to discuss marine pollution-related liability and compensation issues in the region.

9 I hope this Conference will provide you with an opportunity to gain a comprehensive

overview of all the various aspects in dealing with marine pollution. It is with pleasure that I

now declare the IOPCE 99 open.

10 Thank you.

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