

Singapore Government

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(AMENDED) SPEECH BY MR SIDEK SANIFF, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AT THE OPENING OF “THE ASIA PACIFIC RESPONSIBLE CARE CONFERENCE 2000” HELD IN PAN PACIFIC HOTEL ON MON 6 NOV 2000 AT 8.25 AM

Good Morning

Mr Ooi Chwee Kim

Chairman of Singapore Chemical Industry Council

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 It gives me great pleasure to be here with you this morning to launch the “Asia Pacific Responsible Care Conference 2000”. The Conference is organised by the Singapore Chemical Industry Council (SCIC) and supported by the Ministry of the Environment (ENV), Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and Economic Development Board (EDB).

2 I am also pleased to note that SCIC has timed the holding of this Conference to coincide with this year’s “Clean and Green Week”. This Conference demonstrates SCIC’s continued commitment in the protection and care of the environment in Singapore.

3 I would like to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to our friends and experts from the Asia Pacific region. We appreciate your taking time off from your busy schedule to come to Singapore to share your technical

knowledge, expertise and experience in the safe management of hazardous chemicals and environmental pollution control. I wish you a pleasant stay in Singapore and I hope that you can find time to explore and know Singapore better.

4 The Responsible Care programme is the initiative of the chemical industry. It first started in Canada in the mid-1980s to improve health, safety and environmental performance of the chemical industries. Since then, the Responsible Care Initiative has spread world-wide. SCIC has adopted the Responsible Care Initiative in Singapore in 1990. I am pleased to note that since then, SCIC has been very active in promoting the programmes under the Initiative.

5 The theme for today's Conference is "Globalisation of Responsible Care – Drive to World Class Performance". The aim of the Conference is to promote chemical safety and care for the environment among chemical and petrochemical industries in the Asia Pacific region. I am heartened to learn that Chief Executive Officers and the senior management of many multi-national companies are attending the Conference to show your personal commitment in driving the Responsible Care Initiative.

6 Since the 1960's, Singapore has achieved industrialisation and economic growth without adversely affecting our environment. Our industrialisation path took us away from labour-intensive industries to high valued-added and technologically challenging ones such as the electronics, petrochemical and chemical industries. The chemical industry has now become a key component of Singapore's manufacturing sector.

7 The rapid growth of the chemical industry in Singapore has created a need for large quantities of chemicals. Today, there are over 2,000 companies in Singapore that handle or use hazardous chemicals. These hazardous chemicals have the potential to adversely affect human health, endanger human lives, damage properties and pollute the environment. In recent years, there had been numerous incidents arising from mishandling of hazardous chemicals in other countries. Two well-known incidents were the release of toxic methyl isocyanate from a pesticide factory in Bhopal in India and the explosions and fires at a LPG installation in Mexico. The impact of these incidents was catastrophic. Many people perished, numerous properties damaged and the environment tarnished.

8 All these incidents could have been averted if there were in place a stringent system of controls for the management and use of hazardous chemicals, together with rigorous enforcement by the authorities as well as the industries

themselves. In Singapore, we are fortunate that we have so far not had any major accidents involving hazardous chemicals. Since the 1980s, my Ministry together with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) and other agencies have put in place a comprehensive system of controls to minimise potential hazards from the handling and use of hazardous chemicals by industries. These controls have been rigorously enforced, whilst at the same time allowing our industries access to the chemicals they need for their manufacturing activities.

9 In 1996, as a first step towards self-regulation by industries, my Ministry introduced the annual safety audit scheme to spur the chemical installations to systematically identify and rectify weaknesses in their management systems and practices of handling hazardous chemicals. This scheme has worked well. It has helped industries to improve and maintain a sound level of management and practices of handling hazardous chemicals in their installations.

10 We recognise that training is an essential element for success in the implementation of any chemical safety and control programme. My Ministry has, therefore, collaborated with SCIC, tertiary institutions and other government agencies in conducting training courses, workshops and seminars on management and handling of hazardous chemicals for chemical and petrochemical industries.

11 I would like to emphasise that the successful implementation of any chemical safety and control programme would require commitment from the industries. Industries must be committed to ensure that sound management and practices are adopted to prevent accidents.

12 I am, therefore, heartened to note that SCIC is committed in its efforts in reaching out to the industries through the Responsible Care Programme to promote safety, health and the environment in the chemical and petrochemical industries in Singapore. I would like to commend SCIC for its commitment and efforts in contributing to the protection of human lives and the environment.

13 My Ministry fully supports the Responsible Care Initiative as it is in line with the government's regulatory control requirements. When I launched the Responsible Care Formal Commitment on 15 October last year, CEOs from 50 companies signed the formal pledge to adopt the Responsible Care Programme. Today, I am pleased to learn that 67 CEOs have signed the pledge.

14 This Conference itself has demonstrated the initiative and proactive role played by the industries in taking responsibility towards the environment. I

hope that by the end of the Conference, participants will understand better how Responsible Care can be adopted as part of your business culture.

15 In concluding, let me express my gratitude to SCIC as well as my colleagues at ENV, MOM and EDB, for making this Conference possible. On this note, it gives me great pleasure to declare this Workshop open. I wish you a fruitful deliberation.

16 Thank you.

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