

**OPENING ADDRESS AT THE SCCCI-CWG  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY CELEBRATIONS  
SUNDAY, 4 MAR 2018, 5.30PM, GRAND COPTHORNE WATERFRONT  
MRS JOSEPHINE TEO, MINISTER, PRIME MINISTER’S OFFICE,  
SECOND MINISTER FOR MANPOWER AND HOME AFFAIRS**

Mr Roland Ng, President of the SCCCI

Council Members of the SCCCI

Distinguished guests

**Introduction**

1. I am pleased to join you here today.
2. This evening, we celebrate International Women’s Day.
3. In Singapore, our women have achieved much. We live long and healthy lives. Our female labour force participation rate has also improved. We are ranked 18<sup>th</sup> compared to OECD countries, up from 22<sup>nd</sup> 5 years ago.
4. We also did comparatively well in the United Nations’ Gender Inequality Index – 11<sup>th</sup> out of 159 countries. Our women do as well, if not better, academically, and they are well represented in the private, public and people sectors and to a growing extent, in politics.
5. The theme for today’s event, “*She Is Global*”, reflects the nature of today’s global business environment. Globalisation is like a double-edged sword. It can

create more jobs and opportunities, with improved access to foreign markets. But it can also present challenges, as our companies are exposed to intense competition from abroad. As women account for 45% of Singapore's labour force, employers must recognise that to stay competitive in the global marketplace, they need to unlock the potential of women talents in the workforce.

6. However, if we compare ourselves to Nordic countries, our labour force participation rate for middle-aged women is lower. One reason could be because women exit the labour force to fulfil their childcare responsibilities, which still fall largely on women, and some feel compelled to stay home. There is therefore a pool of female talent that we can tap.

### **Helping women fulfil their potential**

6. Over the years, the Government has enhanced our support measures to help women to better achieve their career and family aspirations.

7. Mothers have 16 weeks of paid maternity leave. To encourage greater shared parental responsibility, fathers now have 2 weeks of paid paternity leave and can also share up to 4 weeks of their wife's maternity leave. This allows fathers to be more involved in child-raising, which helps more women to stay active in the workforce.

8. Occasionally, there are calls for Government to legislate long-term childcare leave such as those commonly seen in European countries, so that we can boost total fertility rate. However, most women in Singapore would actually prefer to remain in the workforce or to rejoin the workforce at the earliest opportunity.

9. The government is therefore investing in more pre-school places near homes and workplaces to enable women to continue working after giving birth.

10. In the last 5 years, the labour force participation rate for females aged 40-59 has improved from 68% to 73%, but still lower than the Nordic countries. We should aim to raise it further.

11. It is also important that more companies provide flexible work arrangements or FWAs. These can be particularly helpful in keeping more women employed in a globalised environment. Companies that provide such FWAs would also be better able to attract and retain their valued employees.

12. To encourage and guide employees to offer FWAs, we launched the Tripartite Standard on FWA last year. To date, more than 330 employers, covering about 250,000 employees, have adopted the Standard.

13. To enable employees to adopt FWAs, we rolled out the WorkPro Work-Life Grant in 2013. Since then, more than 1,500 companies that collectively employ more than 100,000 employees have benefited from the Grant.

14. One of the grant recipients was Federal Hardware Engineering, a local SME which sells general hardware wholesale. Today, 3 in 4 employees at Federal Hardware use FWAs. This has helped Federal Hardware keep its staff happy, and retain good employees.

15. One such employee is Ms June Loo, who works as a finance manager at Federal Hardware. 4 years ago, she found it difficult to work full-time while taking care of her young child and family. She had a tough decision to make – continue to work full-time and sacrifice some of her caregiving responsibilities, or resign and return to the workforce later. She initially wanted to resign, but decided against it when her boss counter-suggested a job sharing arrangement, a form of FWA. This

worked well for her and Federal Hardware. Happy with the arrangement, Ms Loo stayed on with Federal Hardware, without giving up her caregiving responsibilities. After two years on job sharing, and with her child more grown-up, Ms Loo requested to go back to work full-time. She is still working flexibly – she starts work at 7:30am and ends work at 4:45pm, which coincides with her child's time at school. This enables her to better meet both her work and family responsibilities.

16. Like what Federal Hardware did for Ms Loo, we should help those who wish to work to do so. They should not have to choose between full-time work and zero-time. To help companies provide more working options in between, I am happy to announce that we will extend and enhance the Work-Life Grant, which is due to expire in March 2018.

17. The enhanced grant will better support employers to support the adoption of FWAs. In fact, we will:

- (i) First, make it easier for employers to qualify for the grant;
- (ii) Second, provide more funding for each employee on FWA; and
- (iii) Third, introduce a higher grant amount for job sharing for PMET jobs.

18. First, we will make it easier for employers to apply for the enhanced grant by simplifying the criteria. Employers no longer require at least 20% of all employees to be on FWAs, to qualify for the grant. This was in response to feedback from companies on the difficulties they face in meeting this criteria. Under the enhanced WLG, the employer will receive some funding so long as one or more employees adopt FWAs.

19. Second, we will fund employers \$2,000 for each employee on FWA, up to 35 employees. Higher than current funding support.

20. Third, we recognise that it is harder for employers to make arrangements for PMET jobs to be shared. Federal Hardware, for example, had to first split the job into two parts, then ensure there is a smooth handover between the job-sharing colleagues each time they take over from each other. Instead of one employee, the supervisor now has to deal with two, for the same job. So if the employer provides job sharing for an existing employee in a PMET job, the employer can receive a higher incentive of \$3,500 per employee, up from a maximum of \$2,000 per employee under the current WLG.

21. The higher grant per employee on FWA, including job-sharing, will provide more upfront support to help employers take the first step to encourage their employees to adopt FWAs. Thereafter, employers should play their part and continue to sustain employees' adoption of FWAs, and make FWA adoption more widespread within their organisation.

22. The enhanced Work-Life Grant will be effective from 1 Jul 2018. The government has set aside a budget of \$30m over 2 years for this scheme. I therefore urge this audience of progressive entrepreneurs and business representatives in SCCCI to take up the grant and likewise, encourage your peers to do so, and provide FWAs to their employees.

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### **Conclusion**

23. The Government, together with our tripartite partners, will continue working towards making Singapore a Great Place for Families, and to foster progressive and inclusive workplaces. In doing so, we want to enable women to benefit from the expanded employment opportunities created by globalisation.

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JOSEPHINE TEO WILL BE DELIVERING THE SPEECH IN CHINESE**

24. Lastly, I would like to thank SCCCI Career Women's Group for organising this annual event to celebrate International Women's Day.

25. With this, I wish everyone a good evening. Thank you.

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