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SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, AT THE LAUNCH OF
UNIFEM (UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN) SINGAPORE CHAPTER AT TRADERS
HOTEL ON FRIDAY, 2 JULY 99, 7.00 PM

Your excellencies, Dr Noeleen Heyzer,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

As patron of the UNIFEM Singapore Chapter, it is with great pleasure that I
stand here today to make some brief remarks.

The Objectives of UNIFEM

2 The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was founded in 1976, at the beginning of the UN Decade for Women, in response to a call by thousands of women around the world for a Fund within the United Nations System to help improve the living standards of women in developing countries and to address their concerns. Recognising that women are critical actors in families, communities and economic systems, UNIFEM's belief is that the best way to help women is to strengthen the organisations that they create and control, while fostering links and partnerships at every level.

3 UNIFEM is both an advocacy and a learning organisation. Vital to the learning process are two things: (a) Listening to women – how they articulate

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their dreams, for themselves and their communities, and (b) Studying or reflecting on the experience of forming partnerships with women's organisations throughout the developing world.

4 UNIFEM's objectives are to work strategically for gender equality and the economic and political empowerment of women in developing countries. To achieve this, it seeks to ensure that women participate in all levels of development planning and practice, fosters multilateral policy dialogues on women's issues, and acts as a catalyst within the UN system, by constantly linking the needs and concerns of women to all critical issues on the national, regional and global agenda.

UNIFEM's Work

5 To implement its policies and programmes around the world, UNIFEM adheres to what it calls an empowerment framework. This framework is based primarily on the promotion of women's rights, opportunities and capacities. Within this framework, UNIFEM has focused on three main areas of work: -

- (1) To strengthen women's economic capacity as entrepreneurs and producers, especially in the context of the new trade agenda and emerging new technologies;
- (2) To increase women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels.
- (3) To promote women's human rights, with particular emphasis on the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

6 With these three thematic areas of focus, UNIFEM funds numerous projects and interventions in 93 countries of the developing world: in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. I learnt with particular interest about UNIFEM's projects in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the network set up among Sri Lankan women who migrate to the Middle East as domestic workers, training in fish processing techniques provided to Vietnamese women, and efforts to raise public recognition of women's contributions to the national economy, through measuring and recording such contributions in national statistics and censuses in countries like Nepal, Pakistan and India.

7 Of particular significance also is UNIFEM's Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women. The Trust Fund has achieved growing recognition as a multilateral mechanism providing financial support for international, regional, national and grassroots actions aimed at eradicating violence against women. I note that, in Southeast Asia, the fund will support the production of an information package, which will showcase innovative and effective actions against violence against women and which will be distributed to governments, NGOs and private institutions.

UNIFEM Singapore

8 The Singapore Chapter of UNIFEM was established as a society in January 1998, with the objective of supporting the work of UNIFEM as well as encouraging Singaporeans to make a meaningful contribution to and increase Singapore's visible presence in the community of nations. At a time when we are encouraging

Singaporeans to be active citizens and participate fully in building a civic society, it is also timely to encourage more Singaporeans to adopt a wider perspective and look beyond our local confines to the needs and aspirations of the international community. We should and can play a bigger part in contributing to the welfare of the developing countries. Organisations such as the Singapore International Foundation, the Red Cross Society, and others like UNIFEM (Singapore) have a significant role to play in raising funds and encouraging more locals to volunteer their services in worthwhile projects in the region and beyond. We hope that UNIFEM Singapore will tap on our Republic's resources and expertise as a regional technological, financial, health and education centre for its work to help women and children in the developing world. The Singapore Chapter is also very proud that it is a Singaporean, Dr Noeleen Heyzer, who is at the helm of UNIFEM!

9 Finally, I would like to congratulate the Executive Committee of UNIFEM Singapore on the launch of the society. The Committee has already initiated some projects, which you will hear about later. I applaud their efforts and offer my strong support for their future work to help make the world a better place to live for women and children.

Thank you.

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