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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG,
MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY
AT THE VTS 2000 SYMPOSIUM AT THE PAN PACIFIC HOTEL
ON 18 JANUARY 2000 AT 0900HRS**

Mr William O'Neil, Secretary-General of the IMO,

The Symposium on Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) had its beginnings in London more than 3 decades ago as a forum to discuss and promote navigational safety. Since then, the Symposium has come a long way, growing in significance and strength. After being held every four years in Europe or North America, it is being held in Asia for the first time. And Singapore is indeed honoured to be the first Asian country to host this major event.

2 Improvements and solutions to vessel traffic services are the responsibility of all members of the maritime industry. As such this Symposium, which brings together port authorities, VTS operators, shipmasters, marine pilots, researchers and engineers, is both timely and a most appropriate platform to raise awareness of and to address the challenges facing vessel traffic services.

3 Shipping is, by its very nature, a global industry. International standards for vessel traffic services are therefore necessary in the interests of safety. Efforts to promulgate such standards and to improve safety in maritime operations in general are hence best carried out at the international level, under the auspices of the IMO. I am glad to note that the VTS 2000 Symposium will discuss among other issues, the need for such international standards and associated issues.

IMO initiatives

4 A set of international standards for vessel traffic services was developed in 1998. It outlined the responsibilities of the Contracting States in planning and implementing a VTS to improve safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the marine environment. I am happy to note that the IMO has adopted these guidelines for VTS as well as criteria for the recruitment, qualifications and training of VTS operators.

5 Another major effort by the IMO was the proposed programme requiring ships to carry an Automatic Identification System (AIS). For a start, new ships of over 300 gross tons used for international trade will be required to carry an AIS transponder by 2002.

MPA initiatives

6 Singapore, as a major hub port, strongly shares the concerns of IMO and the international shipping community about navigational safety. We are committed to enhancing safety and efficiency in vessel traffic management and the protection of the marine environment. Let me touch briefly on the contributions by Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority, MPA, in these important areas. In support of the Automatic Identification System (AIS) initiative, the MPA completed a pilot project last year to evaluate the performance of such a system. The results from the pilot test indicated that AIS ship transponders could reduce a VTS operator's time spent on verbal communication with vessels by as much as half. This would mean that a VTS operator would be able to pay more attention to his main task of monitoring traffic to avert collision or grounding, thus enhancing navigational safety. I understand that the MPA has shared its experiences with other IMO members and is studying the implementation of AIS transponders for the Port of Singapore.

7 With the rising number of larger and faster vessels calling at ports, the need

to ensure navigational safety and the protection of the marine environment is even more pressing. This depends largely on the ability of port authorities to monitor and interact with vessel traffic efficiently.

8 Without an efficient vessel traffic system, the Port of Singapore would have great difficulty coping with the increasing number of vessel calls. In 1990, when the Port of Singapore launched its first VTS, the port handled more than 60,300 vessel arrivals. This has grown by more than 130 per cent to over 140,000 calls last year.

9 Against this backdrop of rapid growth in vessel traffic, the MPA has spared no effort in ensuring that shipping traffic in Singapore is handled quickly and safely. Measures adopted so far include the introduction of the IMO-approved Traffic Separation Schemes, and STRAITREP, a mandatory ship reporting system, jointly implemented by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The MPA's VTS is linked to nine radars located along the coast of Singapore and its off-shore islands. It can track up to 5,000 vessels in real-time.

10 However, advanced VTS technology requires skilled VTS staff to operate it. It is heartening to note that training of staff has not been overlooked and in fact remarkable developments have been made in the standard of training for VTS personnel in recent years. The model courses for VTS operators prepared by the IALA is one such development. They cover various modules such as Traffic Management, Nautical Knowledge, Communication Co-ordination, Equipment, VHF radio, Language and Emergency. These courses would provide staff with the basic skills to operate a VTS.

Conclusion

11 Let me conclude by reiterating that Singapore is committed to working with other relevant parties towards cleaner seas and safer oceans. I would also like to express our appreciation to Mr William O'Neil, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for his personal support for this Symposium. His presence underscores the IMO's strong commitment to navigational safety. Our thanks also to Mr Torsten Krusse, Secretary-General of IALA for working with MPA to make this symposium possible.

12 On that note I wish you all an enriching seminar. And to our overseas friends who have travelled many miles to be here today – I hope you will take some time to enjoy Singapore and take home fond memories.