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Her Excellency Ms Gila Altmann, Parliamentary State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety,

His Excellency Ambassador Andreas Michaelis,

Members of the Government Parliamentary Committee on Environment,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning

1 I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Her Excellency Ms Gila Altmann, and all our visitors from Germany and 15 Asia-Pacific economies to this "Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop cum Exhibition on Sustainability in Solid Waste Management", organised jointly by the environmental agencies of Germany and Singapore.

2 I also wish to acknowledge the presence of many experts from the business and government sectors, who are here this week to contribute to the deliberations on the challenging issue of solid waste management.

3 Last month, many of us attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa. There was a general perception in the global community that the world we live in has not become more sustainable compared to 10 years ago.

4 Based on current trends and future projections, the United Nations reported that the world's population topped 6 billion in 2000, up from 4.4 billion in 1980. It is projected to reach 8 billion by 2025 and 9.3 billion in 2050. Population density in developing countries is high and will continue to grow. It is projected to pose enormous strain on natural resources including land, air and water.

5 Take water and sanitation for example, today, more than 1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water, and 2.5 billion people lack proper sanitation. Contaminated water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene are main causes of diseases in developing countries. Malaria alone causes more than 1 million deaths every year. By 2025, half the world population will face shortage in fresh water.

6 There is therefore much we need to do together as a global community to make our world more sustainable. As pointed out by UN Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, on the last day of the Summit, the success or failure of WSSD would be determined by actions taken by the individual nations after the Summit. He hopes that the Summit will lead to more concrete actions all over the world, at the national, regional and global levels.

7 I agree wholeheartedly with this call for action. Each one of us, as responsible member

of the global community, must do whatever we can to help ourselves sustain our economic growth, social progress and environment protection. At the same time, we must also learn from each other and work with each other to speed up the pace of capacity building in our respective regions, and across the globe so as to narrow the gaps of social, economic and environmental divides.

8 Singapore is doing its part. We recognise that one global challenge the world now faces is the need to change our consumption and production patterns to prevent over exploitation of natural resources. In our Singapore Green Plan 2012, we have set for ourselves several bold targets to conserve resources, minimise waste and maximise recycling. We strive to learn as much and as fast as we can from the best practices of other countries. At the same time, we seek to collaborate with others to spread the adoption and adaptation of these best practices so as to help speed up the pace of capacity building among fellow developing countries.

9 This workshop is a good illustration of our efforts and commitment. For many years now, we have learned from the experience and expertise of Germany in solid waste management, in particular the area of refuse incineration. Having come this far, we are taking another step forward. This time round, we are learning from Germany and the Netherlands the concept of "towards zero landfill". This means diverting as much waste as possible away from landfill, by turning these wastes into useful resources.

10 We recognise that "towards zero landfill" is an ambitious target. Fortunately, we are not starting from base zero. Over the last decade, we have managed to reduce the amount of waste disposed at our landfill by 2/3, from 0.9 million tonnes in 1992 to 0.3 million tonnes in 2001. Looking forward, our next target is to increase the overall recycling rate in Singapore from 44% today to 60% by 2012. We are also exploring new and better ways of re-using wastes, such as turning incineration bottom ash into road paving materials, soft marine clay into soil stabilising materials, and green waste into bio-fertiliser. By adopting a new mindset towards waste minimisation and resource re-use, we aim to be among the early adopters to find a long-term solution to achieve sustainable management of solid waste.

11 In our search for innovative solutions, partnership among our people, industry and the government is key to success. However, it is also important to forge partnership and promote participation beyond our national boundary. This is because: firstly, many environmental challenges are regional and global in nature; secondly, we can all move faster by sharing our expertise and working together, instead of working separately on our own.

12 Since the establishment of the Germany-Singapore Environmental Technology Agency (GSETA) in 1991, we have organised 14 regional events. These events were well received, and attracted more than 650 participants from the Asia-Pacific. The staging of this workshop will provide yet another platform to facilitate further collaboration in the region.

3 The Singapore Government values the synergistic partnership brought about by GSETA, as it capitalises on the complementary strengths of Germany and Singapore in the area of environment protection. It has certainly strengthened the ties between our two countries. It has also provided an effective platform to facilitate the sharing and spreading of environmental know-how and best practices in the Asia-Pacific. We look forward to doing more together in the coming years to help make our world more sustainable for development.

14 Before I end, I wish to extend our special thanks to Ms Gila Altmann and the distinguished delegation from Germany. Ms Altmann has been very kind to honour this workshop with her presence.

15 I also wish to recognise the contributions of our two organising partners: the Singapore Confederation of Industries (SCI) and the Waste Management and Recycling Association of Singapore (WMRAS). SCI is a keen supporter of industry recycling. It is now working on a "waste exchange database" to facilitate trading of recyclables among local companies. As for WMRAS, the Association has since been at the forefront of waste minimisation and recycling efforts in Singapore. The members of WMRAS are indeed pioneers of our emerging recycling industry.

16 Last but not least, I would like to thank all our speakers, exhibitors and participants for your presence at this event. I wish you a fruitful exchange of views over the next 3 days. To all our friends and visitors from overseas, I hope you will take some time off to sample the sights and sounds of Singapore, and have an enjoyable stay.

17 It is now my pleasure to declare the "GSETA Asia Pacific Workshop cum Exhibition on Sustainability in Solid Waste Management" open.

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