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Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

It is my pleasure to be here today to witness the launch of the LOO Campaign. Your strong support and participation in this campaign is a clear indication that more Singaporeans are concerned about the state of our public toilets, and feel strongly that the community and industry also have a part to play in promoting a high standard of public toilet hygiene.

A Timely Campaign

2 The cleanliness and hygiene of public toilets is a perennial problem. Toilet owners and operators attribute the filth to inconsiderate users. Toilet users blame it on the lack of basic amenities and cleaners for not cleaning the toilets properly. Cleaners in turn retort that they are not provided with proper cleaning equipment.

3 It is therefore timely that the Restroom Association Singapore (RAS) is launching the LOO Campaign involving toilet owners, operators, cleaners, contractors and users, to explore these problems from various perspectives and approach them with the right remedies.

Toilet Owners and Operators

4 This campaign brings to mind the National Environment Agency's efforts to uphold a high standard of public toilet hygiene during the SARS outbreak in 2003. Some of you may recall the 'Singapore's OK' Campaign which harnessed the collective commitment of the management, the cleaners and the general public in raising the standard of hygiene and cleanliness for all public toilets in Singapore. The measures had worked well back then largely due to the fear of the disease. It is most unfortunate that with the fear factor removed, standards have also fallen gradually.

5 Similarly, a two-year \$4m programme^[1] to encourage coffeeshop owners to upgrade their toilets had led to the upgrading of 73% of such toilets by the end of 2004. However, due to poor maintenance and user behaviour, it continues to be a challenge to maintain the cleanliness levels in these toilets. If there is one point that the outcome of these programmes show, it is that we need the sustained commitment from everyone involved,

not just the toilet owners and operators but also the general public, to maintain a high standard of cleanliness for our public toilets.

6 With Singapore hosting more international events such as the recent F1 race and the upcoming Youth Olympic Games in 2010, toilet owners and operators have to start adjusting their mindset to understand that providing quality services also includes the provision of toilets with high standards of cleanliness and hygiene. I am therefore, heartened to see big organisations from various sectors pledging their support for the LOO Campaign today. This is a good start. For the campaign to be even more successful, RAS will need more toilet owners and operators to come onboard.

Toilet Cleaners

7 An aspect of public toilet hygiene that is not often discussed is the people who provide the cleaning services. Here, I am talking not just about the provision of training but also on their welfare.

8 Toilet cleaners play a vital role in the maintenance of public toilets. Efforts by RAS to work with the World Toilet College to conduct courses for cleaners to enhance their job performance will help to change public perception of the profession.

9 A letter published recently in the Straits Times, however, highlighted a more critical issue on how toilet cleaners are compensated for helping to maintain Singapore's reputation as a clean nation. The writer highlighted that a cleaner's basic monthly pay of \$750 is not much different from the \$700 the cleaners were paid 13 years ago. This is a typical scenario depicting how toilet owners and operators often opt for cheap sourcing instead of best sourcing. This in turn translates to low paying jobs for cleaners and inability to attract good quality workers to perform the tasks. With the launch of the LOO Campaign, let's hope that the employment conditions of toilet cleaners would improve.

Toilet Users

10 The last piece of the puzzle in this campaign is really the toilet users like you and me. In this respect, I am happy to note that RAS has been active in their Happy Toilet School Education Programme, inculcating good toilet habits among the young.

11 Incidentally, the "LOO" in "LOO Campaign" does not only refer to the toilet but it is also an acronym for "Let's Observe Ourselves". As toilet users are vital to the cleanliness of toilets, I would like to urge everyone to start paying more attention on how we can help to ensure the cleanliness of public toilets. By doing so, we will be a step closer to becoming a gracious society.

Concluding Remarks

12 In conclusion, I would like to wish the Restroom Association Singapore every success in this campaign.

Thank you.

^[1] Toilet Upgrading Programme

National Archives of Singapore