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**SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, NTUC SECRETARY-GENERAL  
AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE STAFF UNION OF NTUC  
RESEARCH UNIT AT 6.00 PM ON FRIDAY 24 APRIL 1992  
AT THE STUDIO, NTUC CLUB (SHENTON WAY)**

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Trade unions have been around in Singapore for some 50 years. In the 1950s and 60s, they were militant for good reasons. Today, both unions and managements have changed. Employers are generally considerate and enlightened; unions, on the other hand, have responded by being cooperative and responsible.

2 Many major organisations, both in the public and private sectors, are unionised. But there are still employers who feel uncomfortable about unions. If they could help it, they would rather not have unions in their enterprises.

3 The law in Singapore is very clear on the issue of union membership. No one can force a person to join a union. Neither can anyone stop a person from joining a union. This is in line with the Principle of 'Freedom of Association' which is adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

4 NTUC believes in freedom of association. We let workers themselves decide whether they want to join unions. No employers should employ scare tactics to

4 make them decide against their will.

5 Why do workers want to join unions? They do so because they want to safeguard their interests as much as to enjoy the many benefits that come with union membership. So employers must understand the reasons and let workers join unions to enjoy the welfare benefits, recreational facilities and other services. With their needs satisfied, workers would be able to put their hearts and minds to their work and thus be able to give their best to the company.

6 NTUC welcomes the formation of the Staff Union of NTUC Research Unit (SUN for short). Although you have been enjoying all the NTUC Club benefits when you were members of the NTUC Staff Welfare and Recreation Committee, it is better that you formalise your ties with the NTUC Club by being union members.

7 In SUN, there is no distinction between junior and senior staff for union membership. All can join the union; all can stand for election for union office, with the exception of senior officers who are responsible for the recruitment, promotion and benefits of workers. We maintain that there is no conflict of interest between management and workers if supervisors and executives join unions. We lead by example. Our message to employers is clear.

8 At this stage, I wish to congratulate those of you

who have volunteered to serve in the Protem Committee. You have done well. So far, 234 out of 243 or 96% of potential members have signed up.

9 The groundwork has been completed. It is now up to those elected as leaders to come to grips with the more challenging task - of running a union.

10 As a union within a union, you will come under close scrutiny - by observers of the industrial relations scene. If you succeed, you will not just advance the interests of your members, but also the cause of the trade union movement in the country.

11 Let me wish you every success.

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