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PLEASE EMBARGO TILL AFTER DELIVERY

SPEECH BY MR EUGENE YAP, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (LABOUR AND ENVIRONMENT) AT THE OPENING OF THE ILO-SNEF SYMPOSIUM FOR ASEAN EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS ON MONDAY, 28 OCTOBER 1985 AT HOTEL TAI PAN AT 9.00 AM.

I note that this symposium plans to discuss two matters - services that employers federation can provide and ILO labour standards setting. These are very important issues and could not have come up for discussions at a more appropriate time.

2 We have come a long way from the industrial revolution days of yore where workers were blatantly exploited by their employers. Today, attitudes are very different. However, for some people, habits seem to die hard. There are still some people today who adopt attitudes which are not conducive to better labour-management relations and it is this area on which employers federation can spend a little more time - to enlighten the unenlightened, remove contaminants to an otherwise healthy working relationship and make the working environment more hygienic.

3 A new battalion of workforce has come of age. These workers are better educated and better trained. They expect to be consulted and be provided with more information on matters which concern them. They expect to participate. They think differently from their predecessors. Thus, to treat members of this new workforce or even the older workforce in exactly the same way workers were treated some years ago, is courting trouble - it will merely continue the cycle of disaffection. Those who are in the business of managing people should therefore be aware of the factors that make workers tick. This can come through proper training and education.

4 I am glad that in Singapore, employers have realised the importance of training and upgrading of people managers. As a result, there has been an improvement in the quality of their management. Disputes with union officials are more amicably settled these days through direct negotiation or conciliation. This can be seen from the fact that it is only in exceptional circumstances that an

industrial dispute needs to be referred to the Industrial Arbitration Court. Industrial harmony has over the years been an important contributing factor to our economic growth which in turn has brought about a higher standard of living for our workers. Together, we must strive to preserve this harmony.

5 With rapid changes in industry and the need to restructure our economy, the challenges faced by our industrial relations practitioners in establishing good labour management relations will be greater. This is particularly true in the Singapore context where industrial relations practitioners have been relying on the yearly NWC wage increase recommendations as a basis for wage settlement. With NWC likely to play a new role, union and management should make it a point to adjust quickly and better equip themselves to face the challenges of this new scenario. The SNEF therefore has a greater role to play to help industrial relations practitioners meet the challenges ahead. This implies that the SNEF itself must have competent staff to provide member employers with the

necessary knowledge and information on wage negotiation and help employers discuss remuneration of workers in a positive manner, with the object of keeping up the high morale of our workforce and promoting greater co-operation between management and workers, and ultimately higher productivity.

6 While it is essential for employers federations to provide a wider range of services to meet the needs of its member employers, equally if not more important, is the need to foster healthy working relations between management and workers from company to national level. For this purpose, greater dialogue and consultation between employers federations and national labour unions should be initiated and maintained. Greater consultation between the two social partners will indeed help to establish closer rapport and better understanding and set the pace for unions and individual employers to follow. The strengthening of labour-management relations from company to national level will lay a strong foundation for the maintenance of industrial harmony in the years to come.

7 Your symposium will also be discussing the role of employers organisations in the area of ILO labour standards setting. The setting of labour standards is one of the important roles of the ILO to protect workers and to improve their working conditions. However, many ILO member states, particularly those from the developing countries, find it difficult to ratify the ILO conventions. This could be due to the fact that ILO conventions were formulated mainly based on the standards set by developed countries with entirely different cultural backgrounds. As a result, some member states of the ILO are unable to ratify the conventions.

8 The non-ratification of ILO conventions is also due to the rigid implementation of the conventions by the Committee of Experts of the ILO. The Committee seems to give insufficient consideration to the different social and economic conditions faced by different countries.

9 The standards set by the ILO in its conventions and its rigidity in implementing them have been the concern of many countries, particularly among countries in the Asean region. The organisation of this symposium by the ILO and the SNEF for Asean employers to discuss the role of employers organisations in ILO labour standards setting is therefore most relevant. It is hoped that participants of the symposium could deliberate the issue thoroughly and make appropriate recommendations for consideration of the ILO. With active participation from representatives from Asean employers sharing their experiences, I am confident that your symposium will be a success.

10 On this note, it is my pleasure to declare the symposium open.