

**SPEECH BY MR S ISWARAN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION, AT THE SNCF 28<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION, 10 JULY 2009, 6:45 PM AT THE GRASSROOTS' CLUB**

Mr S Chandra Das

Chairman, Central Co-operative Fund Committee

Mr Othman Haron Eusofe

Chairman, SNCF Board of Trustees

Mr Chan Tee Seng

Chairman, SNCF Executive Council

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Introduction**

1 At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Singapore National Co-operative Federation, SNCF, on its 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This evening's celebration is being held in conjunction with the 87<sup>th</sup> International Co-operative Day which lends even greater significance to this special occasion.

**Progress of the Co-operative Movement**

2 We have good reasons to celebrate. The Co-operative Movement in Singapore has come a long way since the Co-operative Societies Act was first passed in 1924. Today, co-ops are present in many aspects of our everyday lives;

ranging from the traditional thrift and loan activities to consumer, employment, insurance, medical care, travel and many other services.

3 Our vibrant Co-operative Movement, with a membership of more than one million, has grown remarkably to become the largest local grassroots movement. Our co-ops have also helped to foster social cohesion and inter-ethnic goodwill – a cornerstone of our racial harmony and nation building efforts.

### **Establishment of SNCF**

4 Since the establishment of the SNCF 28 years ago as a national centre for co-operatives, we have witnessed the consolidation of the Co-op Movement in Singapore. Seventy-three of the 84 registered co-operatives are now within the SNCF fold.

5 Over the last few years, the Singapore Co-operative Movement has also gained global recognition. Both NTUC Income and NTUC FairPrice are listed in the Global Top 300 Co-operatives. SNCF is also actively involved in training, seminars and conferences on the international front.

6 For instance, SNCF successfully hosted the General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in 2007, a high-level global Co-op Conference which attracted more than 1000 participants from 70 countries. In collaboration with its regional counterpart, ICA – Asia & Pacific (ICA-AP), SNCF and selected affiliates also organise an annual ICA Regional Workshop for Managers.

## **Roles of Co-operatives**

7 The Co-op Movement in Singapore is notable not only for the strides it has made over the past 85 years. More importantly, it remains an integral part of our economic and social fabric. I would like to highlight the important purpose served by four broad groups of co-operatives affiliated to SNCF, which are centred around credit, service, campus and NTUC.

8 The Credit Co-operatives were formed to uplift the lives of Singaporeans. Through the Thrift and Loan initiative, they helped individuals avoid permanent indebtedness, and eradicated the need to borrow from illegal money lenders or loan sharks. The Service Co-operatives aim to provide affordable services and employment, thereby mitigating the impact of rising costs on individuals and households. The NTUC Co-operatives perform a similar important function by serving as a benchmark, if not a check, on price and quality against other players in the economy. Their role has been particularly important in the context of inflation last year and the current economic downturn. The Campus Co-operatives strive to promote innovation and enterprise, and also encourage the formation of co-operatives as a form of mutual self-help social enterprise among our youth.

## **Efforts by SNCF**

9 Over the last decade or so, our co-ops have encountered at least three major economic challenges, including the 1997 Asian financial crisis, 2000 dot-com bust and 2003 SARS crisis. They have overcome these adversities and emerged stronger. It is a clear demonstration that the business model of co-operatives serves the people's social and economic needs in both good and bad times.

10 It is also heartening that SNCF is part of a lively and supportive community which cares and strives to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate. In 2005, SNCF led a Co-op Movement and raised more than S\$1 million for the Asian Tidal Wave Fund established as part of post-tsunami efforts. Two years later, SNCF secured approximately S\$645,000 from the Singapore Red Cross Society for the Post-Tsunami Co-operative Reconstruction Project for Aceh and Nias Island.

11 This year, SNCF is raising funds in aid of the Day Activity Centre for the Elderly under the Singapore Amalgamated Services Co-operative Organisation, SASCO DACE. This is an important initiative in the context of Singapore's fast-ageing society, and I commend all SNCF affiliates for giving strong support to the project.

12 Through the Central Co-operative Fund, SNCF is able to help seed new initiatives and support projects that build capabilities within our co-operatives. In this regard, two co-ops formed by our Community Development Councils (CDCs) help disadvantaged women and the unemployed through training and employment.

13 To nurture altruistic and enterprising individuals, and to encourage them to join the co-op movement, SNCF launched the Co-operative Scholarship in 2008. I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to the four promising students who will be awarded their scholarships this evening to pursue their university education.

## **Conclusion**

14 This evening, it is also my pleasure to launch the "SNCF 'IN' Guide to Co-operatives". This book is a valuable resource to enhance our understanding of the

Co-operative Movement since its early days. With this educational and informative guide, I hope that more groups or individuals will be inspired to contribute to the co-op movement in Singapore.

15 On this note, I would like to once again congratulate SNCF on its 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, thank all who have contributed to our co-operative movement, and wish our co-operatives continued success in your important and noble mission.