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Welcome Remarks by Mr Hawazi Daipi, Chairman, Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy & Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health & Manpower, at the Work-Life Conference 2008, 14 August 2008, 9.30am

Ms Claire Chiang, Chairperson, Employer Alliance

Ms Lim Soo Hoon, Permanent Secretary, Public Service Division

Madam Halimah Jacob, Deputy Secretary General, National Trades Union Congress

Mr Cathal Divilly, Managing Director, Great Place to Work Institute, in Ireland

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you.

Introduction

2. It has been three years since the first Work-Life Conference was held here. Then, the concept of Work-Life Harmony was still relatively new to all of us. We have since made significant progress, thanks to the joint efforts of the tripartite partners. In the past year, the Ministry of Manpower, together with the Employer Alliance, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education and the Public Service Division, has held numerous forums with both public and private sector HR practitioners. Another new initiative that the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy, or TriCom, has come up with is the video on Work-Life strategy, which you have just viewed.

3. Our focus on CEO-to-CEO persuasion and efforts to increase Work-Life awareness amongst employees has borne fruit. More employers are now implementing Work-Life strategy in their organisations. Many of these Work-Life projects involve measures to make the workplace a more conducive environment to support employees in their work and family lives, with the most popular being flexible work arrangements. Companies that implement such measures recognise the value of Work-Life Harmony, and how it translates into a win-win outcome for both employers and employees. According to a recent MCYS survey, employees with better Work-Life Harmony are more engaged and productive at work. They also enjoy better mental well-being, and have a happier family life.

Organisations with Successful Work-Life Strategies

4. I would like to share with you how two organisations have successfully implemented Work-Life strategies. The first organisation I will highlight is Morning Star Community Services, a non-profit voluntary welfare organisation that provides family life education, counselling and social work services. Through its Work-Life initiatives, Morning Star has been able to successfully retain its employees. This is a challenging task in the social work sector. Juliana, a principal social worker who has been with Morning Star since 1999, has benefited from flexible work arrangements. Working on a flexi-time and flexi-place arrangement has allowed her to better manage her work, while having the time to care for her five children.

5. A second example is Becton Dickinson Critical Care Systems, a global medical technology company. Becton Dickinson regards its Work-Life efforts, such as the workplace health promotion programme, as a key factor contributing to them reducing their employee turnover rate from 6 % in 2004 to 4.5% in 2007. This is in spite of the tight labour market. Both Morning Star Community Services and Becton Dickinson Critical Care Systems have shown that there is a business case for Work-Life strategy, where employee retention is a real concern in the tight labour market today.

New Initiatives to Promote Work-Life Strategy

6. Moving forward, the TriCom members have also come up with new initiatives to further promote Work-Life Harmony. I note that the Employer Alliance has recently started the First Mover Initiative, a programme aimed at developing workplace solutions for SMEs in particular. So far, 30 SMEs have been selected to participate in the pilot programme. The Work-Life solutions developed for these companies will be used to guide the implementation of such measures for other SMEs. Here, I would like to extend my gratitude to Ms Claire Chiang, Chairperson of the Employer Alliance, and her team for the hard work that they have put in.

7. The significant progress that we have made over the past few years has been noticed and acknowledged internationally. In 2005, Singapore was awarded the Work-Life Innovative Excellence Award by the US-based Alliance for Work-Life Progress, the highest honour that they accord. More recently, Hong Kong has taken an interest in our efforts to promote Work-Life Harmony. Singapore's approach to promote Work-Life culture was featured in a Hong Kong-based tripartite publication. All these would not have been achieved without the contributions and efforts of employers and individuals who have gone the extra mile in implementing Work-Life programmes.

Conclusion

8. While these are achievements that we can be proud of, we still have some way to go before Work-Life Harmony becomes the norm in Singapore. More can be done to encourage companies to adopt Work-Life strategies. Today, we have many distinguished speakers and well-known HR practitioners who will share with us in-depth case studies on how they have implemented Work-Life strategies within their organisations. I am confident that these insights will allow us to pick up the 'tips of their trade' and help us better implement Work-Life measures in our organisations.

9. I wish you a fruitful learning experience. Thank you.