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**WELCOME SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH AND SPORTS, AT THE
OPENING OF THE 14th APEC WOMEN LEADERS
NETWORK MEETING ON 4 AUGUST 2009**

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan

Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports

Ministers, Heads of Delegations

Ms Chua Sock Koong, Chair of the WLN

Parliamentary Colleagues

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and
Gentlemen

Welcome

It is a privilege to welcome all of you to the opening of the 14th APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting. Amongst us today are more than 600 delegates representing our APEC Economies. We also have delegates from 3 non-APEC Economies namely India, Spain and Germany. We are indeed honoured by the overwhelming response we have received for this meeting. Welcome to Singapore.

Women in Singapore

2 The video you have just watched traces significant milestones in the progress of women in APEC and Singapore. The docu-drama is a reflection of our women's journey, a journey of courage, determination, and empowerment. The progress of women has and will always be closely intertwined with the development of the economies in the region.

Women in APEC

3 Women's participation in the global economy has had a robust impact on our economies and global development in general. APEC economies such as Canada, Australia and the United States, where female employment rates are relatively high, between 65 and 75 percent¹, consistently rank highly on the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index each year.²

4 Since its inception in 1989, APEC's total trade has grown approximately five-fold from US\$3 trillion in 1989 to US\$15 trillion in 2007. APEC's per capita GDP has also risen from about US\$5,000 in 1989 to about US\$15,000 in 2007. The average annual increase was 5.7%, compared with 3.1% in the rest of the world³.

¹ World Bank, 2008

² UNDP Human Development Report 2007, 2008

³ APEC 2009

5 Women have played a key role in APEC's economic success. It is estimated that women's economic contributions in the APEC region amount to US\$80b each year. These contributions have come from women in their roles as workers, employers, entrepreneurs, professionals and government officials. Today, women contribute to more than half of the labour force in APEC. Women's participation rate in employment is also highest in the East Asia and Pacific region⁴. As at 2007, the female labour force participation rate in the region was 62.5 %⁵.

6 In business, studies have indicated that as high as 40-45% of total female population in some APEC economies, like Peru and Thailand, are business owners.⁶

⁴ ILO 2008 (cited in UNIFEM Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009)

⁵ ILO 2008 (cited in UNIFEM Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009)

⁶ Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2007; Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand.

7 . The [US Center for Women's Business Research](#) estimates that the current number of women-owned businesses has grown to over 10 million, making up about 40% of all US businesses.

8 These significant influences and contributions of women are replicated in many of our region's economies and underscore the growing influence of women in business.

The APEC Women Leaders Network

9 Since its inception in Manila in 1996, WLN meetings have provided an effective platform for APEC women leaders to discuss issues of concern in the local, regional and global economy. They have also made collective recommendations to APEC leaders.

10 The theme for this year's meeting is '*Women and Sustainable Development in APEC*'. I look forward to

engaging you on your ideas and recommendations in five areas:

- (1) The integration of gender into sustainable policies and practices;
- (2) The development of business environments conducive for women;
- (3) The integration of gender into Info-Communications technology capacity building;
- (4) The promotion of best practices in tripartism and social entrepreneurship for women; and
- (5) The recognition and promotion of sustainable work-life models for women in their multiple roles.

11 These focal areas were developed to account for the diverse nature, size, capacities and needs of our

respective economies and the aspirations of women in these economies.

12 The International Labour Organisation has estimated that an additional 9 million women in the region may become unemployed this year after the global financial crisis, bringing the total number of unemployed women in APEC to around 38 million. Women in vulnerable employment will be most affected.

Given these realities, our priority must be to foster inclusive growth for the future. To that end, I hope that women leaders in APEC will continue to advocate free trade rather than protectionist policies. This was also the call by our trade Ministers when they met here in Singapore just 2 weeks ago.

Leveraging Technology for the Meeting

13 I am pleased to draw your attention to our pioneering effort in piloting the use of video conferencing with Sookmyung Women's University of South Korea. I

hope that this will benefit women leaders who are unable to attend in person.

Appreciation

14 I wish to acknowledge several key individuals and organisations for making this Meeting possible.

15 First, I would like to thank Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for his support and for gracing this event.

16 I would also like to thank Minister Vivian Balakrishnan for his guidance.

17 I thank Ms Chua Sock Koong, the Group Chief Executive Officer of SingTel, for joining me in organising this event. We were supported by a strong group of women leaders from all sectors, including the National Trades Union Congress Women's Development Secretariat, the People's Association Women's Integration Network and the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations with their 54 affiliates. We also

wish to thank the sponsors for their generous donations. Almost 80% of these donations, in cash and in kind, are from women.

18 I am also grateful to the many moderators and speakers who flew in from many parts of the world to share their insights with us.

19 Thank you all for your presence here today. I wish you a most fruitful and engaging meeting.