

Speech by Mr. Michael Ma, President at SOE Awards 2009

Good evening Mr S Iswaran, Senior Minister of State Trade & Industry and Education, SOE board of governors, distinguished guests, honourees, and ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the 2009 Spirit of Enterprise Awards.

I am extremely delighted to be here tonight, celebrating the accomplishments of a very extraordinary group of people. Each one of our honourees has shown great determination, fighting spirit and motivation to overcome the odds and be a shining example of SOE's motto.

The annual SOE Awards serves as a platform for us to recognise the achievements of those who have taken up our calls for entrepreneurship. It is our hope that by publicly recognising the achievement of these individuals, others are inspired and find it worthwhile to join the path of starting a business.

Spirit of Enterprise was started in 2003 by a group of people as a private not-forprofit organization. Its primary aim is to push for the growth of entrepreneurship in Singapore through various activities. SOE is fully funded by the private sector and helmed by an Executive Director and overseen by a Board comprising of successful entrepreneurs, political leaders and top managers in established corporations.

It gives me great pleasure to say that, since its inception, SOE has grown from strength to strength over the last 7 years. This was made possible by all those who have contributed to SOE's cause – from the Board of Governors to the donors, volunteers, sponsors, schools and students.

In line with our mission, SOE has recognised the efforts of more than 1000 entrepreneurs since we first started out. Furthermore, we have continuously added valuable programs to our activities and have collaborated with partners to run these programs.

Each year, we publish a 'Spirit of Enterprise' Book. This book features local businesses and traces their roots, from inception to the many hurdles they had to overcome and how they developed their competitive advantages to find their place in the market. In addition to schools, SOE Book can be found in all major bookstores and libraries. For 2009, the Book donors are Prof Chen, Moe Ibrahim, Steven Fang, Andrew Kwan, Patrick Liew and myself.

By pairing entrepreneurs with schools under the Student-Entrepreneur Program, we have made it possible for our youth to directly interact with successful individuals who possess the real-life business experiences. The aim behind this program is to allow real-time experience to meet classroom theories. These students are then able to gain first-hand knowledge on what it takes to develop a business.

The entrepreneurs also impart innovative-thinking skills that help in sharpening the students' minds. For examples, during an Innovation Week held by Paya Lebar Methodist Secondary School, students had to come up with innovative products that could be marketed commercially.

Another activity that SOE is heavily involved in is the Mentorship Program. Here, we provide mentors to teams participating in the Business Plan Competitions and projects. One such example is the Start-Up@Singapore competition organized by the National University of Singapore and touted to be one of the biggest and most prestigious business plan competitions around.

SOE has been the main mentorship sponsor for Start-Up@Singapore since 2007. This year, we provided around 50 mentors to various schools. I am also proud to announce that we will continue to do so for the next year.

We launched the SOE Entrepreneur Alumni on August 2007 to provide a forum to allow our entrepreneurs to connect and create business opportunities among themselves in a form of business networking event every quarter in a casual and relaxed atmosphere at Indochine, The Forbidden City, Clarke Quay

Recognising that our youths form the backbone of future SMEs, we have recently launched a SOE Student Alumni in September 2009. Run by students, it is a platform for aspiring local and overseas young entrepreneurs to engage one another and cultivate the spirit of entrepreneurship. The first event was recently held in NLB.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Executive Director, Ms Kelly Teoh, for her role in guiding the SOE students committee in setting up the first SOE Student Alumni. My sincere gratitude to Mr Calvin Cheng, Nominated Member of Parliament & CEO of Looque Models & SOE Board member, Mr Tony Seow, CEO of Purple Sage, Zubi Khawaja, Managing Director of Biz Planners & Advisors Pte Ltd and Robin Greatbatch, Owner of The Villa Bali, for their efforts acting as mentors to the SOE Students Alumni Committee and its members.

Another program focused on students is the SOE Speakers Series. Working with tertiary institutions, we collaborate with the likes of UniSIM and provide speakers for its regular seminar such as "Let's Talk Business@UniSIM" for its students and budding entrepreneurs. Speakers are volunteers from SOE's pool of entrepreneur speakers.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Colin Low, GE President/Regional Executive for GE Growth Initiatives, South East Asia, for initiating the SOE Leadership Seminar, which supports the development of SMEs in Singapore on best practices and measures to manage the current downturn and prepare for the eventual economic recovery.

As part of our growth strategies, we have spread our wings from Singapore to Mauritius, Vietnam, China and the United States. Tonight, I am pleased to announce that we are now exploring possible SOE entities in Malaysia and Thailand which will further spread the message across ASEAN.

As we march on and introduce new programs, we ask all of you to continue the strong tradition of entrepreneurship and join us in promoting the invaluable spirit of enterprise. While it is a long and hard road, we are confident of achieving our aims and can already see the fruits of our labour.

Special thanks goes out to our Board members, who have volunteered to run SOE programs as their pet projects, despite numerous demands on their valuable time.

This year, SOE have come up with a new award to recognise their contribution to the environmental and corporate social responsibility.

A big thank you also to all our donors, sponsors such as:

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Miss Earth Singapore

I-Pop Networks Pte Ltd

Mr Tony Tan Lay Thiam,

supporters and volunteers for sticking with us through these years. It is our sincere hope that you will continue to support SOE's efforts and causes.

If you are keen to contribute to SOE's efforts in any way, you can approach me, the SOE Board

members or Ms Kelly Teoh, our Executive Director.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the 30 SOE Awards' honourees for their achievements, the Best Student Interviewers Awardees and Friends of Enterprise Awardees. I wish all of them the best in their future endeavours.

