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APEC MINISTERS ENDORSE THEME FOR SME WORKING GROUP 2009 MEETINGS

Chiclayo, Peru – APEC Ministers responsible for SMEs have endorsed the policy theme for the SME Working Group meetings to be held in Singapore next year.

The Ministers agreed that the theme will be “Helping SMEs Access Global Markets and Overcoming Trade Barriers”, with the sub-themes:

- Market liberalisation to enhance market access among SMEs in member economies
- Facilitate business collaboration by encouraging cross-border networks/platforms
- Support for SME internationalisation

Singapore’s Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Mr Lee Yi Shyan, said 2009 will be the start of the 2009-2012 SMEWG Strategic Plan that has been endorsed by the Ministers. The theme for APEC SMEWG 2009 also covers one of the key priorities* on Market Access and Internationalisation in the SMEWG Strategic Plan. He added that the theme and sub-themes are a continuation of this year’s theme of “Sustainable Local Development to Foster SMEs Growth”.

Singapore will be hosting the APEC Small and Medium Enterprises Ministerial and Working Group Meetings in October 2009. The meetings will be part of a year-long event, with an estimated 88 meetings and many related activities under the various tracks of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. It will culminate in the Leaders’ Week in November, to be attended by the leaders of the 21 APEC economies.

Mr Lee added that key projects in support of the theme and sub-themes have been identified. These include an APEC Business Fellowship Programme and a Study on Export Technical Assistance Models that Singapore has proposed to facilitate market access for APEC SMEs.

** The Strategic Plan priorities are: Business Environment, Building Management Capability and Promoting Entrepreneurship, Market Access and Internationalization, Innovation, Financing and Raise Awareness of Sustainable Business Practices*

Mr Lee said SPRING and IE Singapore will also be organising activities involving the private sector during APEC Singapore 2009. Already, New Zealand is scheduled to organise an Access to Finance seminar, together with Australia, Canada, Peru and Singapore. The seminar is part of a series of seminars to address areas based on the annual World Bank study on Ease of Doing Business. The United States will also be holding a Flu Pandemic Workshop on the margins of the meetings.

Speaking at the Ministerial Meeting, Mr Lee urged APEC members to focus on measures and programmes that move APEC towards the long-term goal of Regional Economic Integration. He acknowledged that while many policies affecting SMEs may have to take into account local political considerations, he also cautioned that “the surest way to destroy SMEs is to protect them from competition”. Mr Lee suggested that members of APEC should continue to help SMEs build up expertise to embrace competition, as this has been a key theme in APEC SME discussions.

Mr Lee said the fast-growing nature of APEC economies, which already account for 55% of the world’s GDP, should motivate APEC members to work closer together towards economic integration and mutual benefits.

H E Mr Udomphol Ninnadm Thailand’s Ambassador to Peru and Head of Delegation at the SME Ministerial Meeting, said, “With a strong SME base, Thailand stands ready to work with Singapore, the host economy of the APEC SME 2009, and will work closely with Singapore in developing activities under the theme and sub-themes endorsed by the APEC SME Ministerial Meeting in Peru, including hosting the first APEC SMEWG in April 2009.”

US Chief of Staff for Market Access and Compliance in the International Trade Administration, Mr Charles Skuba, said, “The US is happy to work with Singapore on hosting the flu pandemic workshop. This cooperation and knowledge sharing is the continuation of the harmonious relationship between the two nations and both nations will work closely to build on the theme. “

Thailand will be hosting the next SME Working Group meeting in March/April 2009. Japan, Hong Kong and the United States will also play host to the meetings in 2010 and 2011.



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