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<u>**MEDIA RELEASE**</u>

The Commissioner of Charities concludes public consultation exercise on tightening of charity registration and launches Charity Portal

The Commissioner of Charities (COC) has concluded the month-long public consultation exercise on the tightening of charity registration. At the same time, the COC will be launching an online Charity Portal to help the charity sector fulfill various registration and reporting requirements. These moves are aimed at developing a more robust regulatory framework as well as providing the charity sector a convenient means of meeting the regulatory requirements.

Strong Support on the Tightening of Charity Registration

2   The COC's office conducted a public consultation exercise between 24 November and 24 December 2006 to seek feedback on three areas where charity registration would be tightened. These are increasing the rigour of assessing charity applications by requiring more detailed background information, monitoring newly registered charities more closely through semi-annual reports in their first year of operations, and specifying conditions for the COC to refuse registration of and to de-register charities.

3   The COC's office received 16 written responses on the proposals. Overall, there was strong support to tighten the registration of new charities. The COC has implemented some proposals such as enhancing the charity registration form and is in the process of implementing the rest.

4   In addition to the public support for the proposals by the COC's office, there were also several suggestions from the public to further enhance the proposals to ensure greater accountability to donors. These included requiring charities to post information such as their Annual Report and audited financial statements on their websites and disclosing the qualifications of trustees and key executive staff of the charities. On the other hand, there were also some concerns regarding over-regulation of the charity sector.

5   To address the concern of over-regulation, the COC's office will not create additional rules to implement the suggestions from the public. Instead, the suggestions will be disseminated to the charity sector for voluntary adoption as good practices.

Charity Portal Launched to Provide One-Stop Resource Centre

6   In tandem with the tightening of charity registration, the COC's office will also launch the Charity Portal (http://www.charities.gov.sg) to provide a convenient one-stop "paper-less" process for application for charity status and institution of a public character (IPC) status. The Charity Portal provides a one-stop resource centre for the public who want to know more about charities in Singapore, including those interested in setting up charities and IPCs. Through the portal, they can understand and seek advice on complying with the different regulatory requirements, as well as learn about developments in the charity sector. Members of the public can also provide feedback to the COC's office through the portal.

7   All existing charities and IPCs, as well as applicants for charity and IPC status, would require SingPass to transact with the Charity Portal. SingPass is an individualised password to transact with the Government's e-services. This helps to ensure accountability and is in line with other e-Government websites such as the Central Provident Fund (CPF)'s and Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA)'s websites. The COC's office encourages all charities and IPCs to apply for the SingPass, if they have not already done so, at this website: http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg/singpass/index.htm

8   The Portal will be progressively enhanced over the next few months to allow charities and IPCs to perform online financial reporting and submit annual tax returns. It will also provide an online Registry of Charities which discloses information on all registered charities to help the public better decide which charities to support.

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