

PRESS RELEASE

COMMISSIONER OF CHARITIES ANNUAL REPORT NEW SMS VERIFICATION SERVICE HELPS DONORS GIVE WITH CONFIDENCE

The Commissioner of Charities (“COC”) has released its annual report for the year ending 31 December 2009. The report provides an overview of the charity sector and activities which the COC Office has undertaken in 2009 to improve charity governance and regulatory compliance and maintain public confidence in charitable giving. It also outlined some new initiatives introduced this year, including a Short Messaging Service (SMS) facility for the public to verify the authenticity of fundraising activities.

Maintain Confidence and Support Charitable Giving

2 Despite the financial turmoil in 2009, Singaporeans continue to show their care and confidence in the charity sector. The total value of tax-deductible donations received remained the same as 2008 at \$687 million. There was a drop in corporate donations from \$476 million to \$447 million. However this was fully offset by a 14% increase in individual donations from \$211 million to \$240 million.

3 To enable the public to continue to donate with confidence, COC introduced an SMS service to allow members of the public to send a query via SMS to check whether an organisation has a permit to solicit donations in public. Please refer to **Annex** on how the SMS facility works. The COC Office at times receives complaints by members of the public that they were approached for donations by dubious charities. Such cases undermine public confidence in the charity sector. With the SMS service, the public will have a quick and convenient way of verifying the authenticity of the fundraising activities they encounter in public. Charities will also run a lower risk of their names being used for donation scams.

Strengthen Charity Governance

4 As part of its ongoing efforts to help charities strengthen their governance and to understand how they operate, the COC Office has also planned a series of small-group networking sessions for charities to discuss governance and regulatory issues. The first session, held in July 2010, was well received by participants. They felt that the small-group session allowed for active participation and dialogue and enabled them to have a better understanding of the available resources under the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund (VCF) that they can tap to improve their governance and capability.

The COC Annual Report is posted on the Charity Portal **<<http://www.charities.gov.sg>>** for public reference.

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Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports

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Guide on how to use the SMS facility

Approved fundraising events in public require either a House to House and Street Collection licence issued by the Singapore Police Force (SPF) or a Collector's Certificate of Authority issued by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) if the organisation raising fund is a member of the NCSS.

To check whether an organisation has a valid Fund Raising Permit, you can send a SMS query to 74688 (i.e. SGOVT), using the following format:

“FR<space><licence/certificate number or organisation name>”.

For example:

- **FR L/HH/001111/2010** (for enquiry by licence number issued by SPF)
- **FR 2010031111** (for enquiry by certificate number issued by NCSS)
- **FR Charity Limited** (for enquiry by organisation name)

The facility will then send you a SMS reply indicating whether the organisation has a valid licence or certificate.

Broadly, there are 3 types of replies from this SMS service:

- (a) If the system is unable to find a record of the fund-raising permit, the SMS reply will be **“No result found for Charity Limited”**.
- (b) If the system can find a record of the fund-raising permit, the SMS reply will be **“Charity Limited has a valid certificate to raise funds from 01/07/2010 to 30/09/2010. You may verify the certificate carried by the fundraiser (Updated as at 04/08/2010).”**
All fund-raisers should carry a copy of the licence/certificate.
- (c) If the system finds more than 5 records, the SMS reply will be **“Your search result returns more than 5 records. Please key in the licence/certificate number or the full name of the organisation.”**

Please note that the system only looks for permits that are valid on the day the SMS query is sent.

For more information about the organisation's fundraising activities, please logon to the Charity Portal at **www.charities.gov.sg**.