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MEDIA RELEASE**

**SINGAPORE TO HOST AND SUPPORT ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL
NETWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

*Collaboration sees the strengthening of early childhood education
development in Asia Pacific*

Singapore, 1 December 2009 – Policy makers and early childhood educators, in Singapore and the region, will now have easier access to research, policies, and best practices in the area of early childhood education with the launch of the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood's (ARNEC) new Secretariat in Singapore.

They will also have more opportunities for networking to share good practices in this region and align Early Childhood Development (ECD) policies according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – an internationally binding set of standards and obligations that spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have.

Singapore is the inaugural host for ARNEC, come December 2009. NTUC's SEED Institute, Singapore's leading training institute for early childhood education, has been appointed to host the ARNEC Secretariat, which was temporarily based at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand since its launch in February 2008.

ARNEC is supported by five key international organizations actively involved in promoting children's rights: The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Open Society Foundation, Plan International, and Save the Children.

Asia-Pacific Early Childhood Development Policy Review Seminar 2009

The announcement of the new ARNEC Secretariat launch in Singapore was made this morning during the “Regional Early Childhood Policy Review Seminar: Sustainable Policies for ECD”, a two-day conference organised by ARNEC and SEED Institute, which is sponsored by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNICEF, and supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport.

Over 100 policy makers, academics, and early childhood education professionals from 15 countries¹ spanning different Ministries are attending the seminar, which was officially opened by Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports and Dr. Festo Kavishe, Deputy Regional Director of UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

One of the objectives of the seminar is to improve coordination and collaboration among key sectors such as education, health, child protection, and women’s affair in order to achieve holistic ECD. It aims to address a gap area that had earlier been highlighted by many countries in the Asia-Pacific – the need to place more attention on aspects of costing, finance and governance for effective and implementable ECD policies.

The seminar will provide learning opportunities for government officials, academics, development partners and industry experts to share practical policy planning methods, measurement tools, and application experiences. Countries will present their draft and/or newly finalised ECD policies for peer review and support.

Keynote speakers include Yale University’s Dr. Pia Britto who will speak on sustainable national policies and Dr. Frank Oberklaid, Director of the Center for Community Health, Royal Children’s Hospital in Australia, on the use of measurement tools to evaluate the outcomes of ECD policies for better policy development and service planning.

¹ Participating countries include Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vanuatu, Vietnam and Singapore.

Importance of Early Childhood Education to the Region

Started in 2008, ARNEC aims to work with various stakeholders and ECD players - such as governments, communities and civil societies - to take responsibility and ensure the provision of adequate and quality early childhood care and education for all young children.

Research has shown that developmental capabilities of children reach their peak before the age of seven. ARNEC acts as a platform for all individuals concerned with young children in the region to voice, learn and share their knowledge and experiences in ECD with others.

ARNEC's activities involves building strong partnerships in the region for ECD, making accessible early childhood resources and evidence-based data for advocacy, and sharing knowledge of effective policies and practices for the benefit of all countries in the region.

ARNEC also aims to work with policy makers to increase investment in Early Childhood Development programmes for improvements in health, nutrition and educational outcomes of young children, which has shown to increase productivity in human capital and reduce social inequality and discrimination stemming from gender, race, ethnicity, caste or religion.

Furthermore, ARNEC will help monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policies at national levels and mobilize field experts to support policy reviews and analysis. By supporting capacity building activities such as regional policy forums and policy/advocacy campaigns, ARNEC will also develop regionally relevant early childhood advocacy materials for the region's use.

SEED Institute to host the ARNEC Secretariat

Singapore was one of three countries in the Asia Pacific region that expressed interest to host the ARNEC Secretariat. SEED Institute was selected to host the ARNEC Secretariat because of its strong track record in local and regional early

childhood training and development. Over the last 10 years, SEED Institute has trained over 500 ECD educators from the Asia Pacific Region in partnership with UNICEF and the Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Working with SEED Institute, ARNEC will compile data on early childhood in Asia-Pacific. It will analyse regional information on national surveys, policies, research on innovative practices, and educational institutions, to create new knowledge and tools for early childhood policy, research, and practice within the region.

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About ARNEC

ARNEC is a professional network established to build strong partnerships in early childhood across sectors and different disciplines in the Asia-Pacific region. ARNEC covers a wide geographical area from East and Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific, totalling 47 countries. Its mission is to strengthen advocacy, policy reviews and development, research and innovative practices in early childhood at national and regional levels with the goals to align these to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to ensure that all children in the region will achieve optimal holistic development.

About NTUC's SEED Institute

SEED Institute (formerly known as RTRC Asia) is built upon a vision to give children the best head-start by grooming early childhood professionals to provide the best care and education to young children. NTUC's SEED Institute was set up in 1989 by the NTUC, in collaboration with the Bernard van Leer Foundation, a Dutch private philanthropic foundation that funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. Today, SEED Institute is recognized as the pioneer in early childhood education training in Singapore. It consists of five Centres of Excellence which specialize in areas including research and best practices, continuous professional development, higher education, professional qualifications and regional partnership.

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