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Business

## Trade bodies issue joint statement to support fair hiring and employment practices

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Nearly 30 trade associations and chambers have come together to issue a joint statement on Tuesday (Jan 19) pledging support for fair hiring and employment practices. Chua Tian Tian reports.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/trade-bodies-fair-hiring-employment-joint-statement-support-13992876>

SINGAPORE: Nearly 30 trade associations and chambers have come together to issue a joint statement on Tuesday (Jan 19) pledging support for fair hiring and employment practices.

A press release from the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), which coordinated the joint statement, said the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented economic disruption for businesses and their workforce.

The joint pledge, made by the 29 trade bodies representing businesses of different sizes across various industries, calls on companies to "remain committed to recruiting candidates fairly based on merit and to developing their workforce".

SBF added that the joint statement is aligned with the Fair Consideration Framework (FCF) and the Tripartite Guidelines for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TGFEPP).

The FCF, introduced in 2014, sets out requirements for all employers to consider Singaporeans fairly for all job opportunities, including job advertisements.

The trade association and chambers (TACs) said in the statement that companies should build a diverse environment and be committed to fair hiring in compliance with the FCF and TAFEPP guidelines.

“Work is a collaboration between employers and employees, and among teams of employees, and diversity is important for businesses,” said the press release.

On practising fair hiring, the TACs said employers must hire the “best-fit” candidate for every job based on merit.

“Candidates may be qualified employees within the company, external candidates based in Singapore, or international candidates if there are no suitable local candidates. Ensure there is diversity within the global talent hired, in order to bring the best perspectives, experiences and support for long-term success,” they added.

Employers should aim to provide development opportunities to help their employees acquire relevant skills for their jobs and be considered for leadership roles. They should also facilitate the transfer of niche or business-critical skills to local employees to ensure business continuity and help develop local talent.

Employees were also urged to do their part by collaborating with employers to create positive workplace environments, and actively undertake development opportunities.

The joint statement comes as the COVID-19 pandemic dragged Singapore into its worst recession since independence. Amid a tough labour market, concerns have risen among local job seekers that they are not getting a fair deal when job hunting.

Asked during a press conference what prompted the joint statement, SBF chairman Lim Ming Yan said the issue of fair hiring has always been top on the minds of many employers.

“Having a strong workforce is a prerequisite to success at the company level ... and I think what COVID-19 resulted in is a lot more pressure on the employment situation in Singapore,” he added.

“So I think that prompted many of us here to think that we need to come up and assure our employees, and also to assure Singaporeans at large that employers remain committed to fair hiring.”

Mr Andrew Kwan, president of the Restaurant Association of Singapore (RAS), noted that the pandemic has seen many businesses adjusting the size and composition of their workforce over the past year.

“As Singapore is now in the midst of emerging out of this crisis, I think it's really appropriate and timely to be reminded that as (employers) restart or add back to some of the adjustments that were made, (they) have to be mindful to constantly embrace this fair practice,” he added.

Acknowledging that the IT industry was one of those that came under scrutiny last year, Ms Yean Cheong, executive director of SGTech, said: “The challenging economic circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic gave cause to review closely the HR practices of companies in Singapore.

“For the tech sector, there are conscious and unconscious bias and misconceptions intrinsic to our sector that needs to be addressed in order for us to implement best practices in our hiring and development.”

One such conscious bias is the assumption that one must be trained in tech to be hired for a tech role.

This notion excludes quality candidates from applying, Ms Cheong noted, even though there are companies that are prepared to invest in training.

Another issue is the gender imbalance in many parts of the tech industry, which SGTech aims to tackle with new initiatives this year to support women who are already in the tech workforce.

It is also looking to work with “strategic partners” to expose the younger generation to potential career options in the sector and dispel gender stereotypes.

Ms Cheong also raised the point of navigating new issues that arise in a “new normal” where remote working could be a permanent fixture.

“We are supporting our member companies to navigate some of these new conditions,” she told reporters. “How do we make sure that co-workers remain connected and feel that their performance is being fairly evaluated?”

“The (joint statement) is not just about hiring. It’s also about supporting our workforce ... because in some cases, some employees are finding it hard to come back to work in the office so there has to be a forum for us to have those conversations.”

Stressing that businesses have a “huge responsibility” to hire fairly, Mr Per Magnusson, chairman of the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, said it is also important to remember that a large majority of the businesses in Singapore are already doing so.

“We should remember that 99 per cent or even more than 99 per cent of all companies in Singapore actually do hire fairly. We should actually go silently after that very small minority who doesn’t and ... publicly praise, cheer on and support that absolute majority who hires in a fair manner,” he added.

Asked why he thinks this should be the case, Mr Magnusson replied: “Because one company (that is) penalised publicly gets all the media attention, while we forget immediately that ... more than 99 per cent of all companies do it in a fair and equitable manner. And it does skew the picture in the public mind and that is very dangerous.”