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**Joint Media Release**

**ACCESSIBLE PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES FOR UNION MEMBERS**

*NTUC and The Law Society of Singapore Jointly Launched  
“Law Awareness & U” Initiative to Help Union Members*

“What are my rights when my employer decides to retrench me?”  
“What should I do if my employer dismissed me unfairly?”  
“How would my job be affected if my company goes into receivership?”  
“What can I do if my previous employer stops me from joining his competitor?”

1 These questions are very real. With the economic downturn seeing no recovery in the near term, these issues would increasingly occupy workers’ minds as their companies get hit by the global crisis. And when the reality of business decline and failure translates into workplace issues like grievances, unfair dismissals, terminations and retrenchments, rank-and-file workers and even executives, would sometimes suffer and need assistance, as seen by union leaders at their companies.

2 Currently, rank-and-file workers who are Ordinary Branch (OB) union members, and executives who are OB members of executive unions can seek help from their unions in their companies. Their unions have direct representation rights to negotiate on their behalf on workplace-related issues like Collective Agreements, wage negotiations, grievances, salary-in-arrear and retrenchment benefits. On the other hand, executives who are not in a unionised company can still join unions as General Branch (GB) union members. These GB union members can approach their unions or the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) for advice on workplace-related issues like benefits, rights and liabilities, labour laws, breach of contract, non-payment of salary, unfair termination and dismissal, maternity and parenthood-related issues, retrenchments and victimisation. Please see [Annex A](#) for case studies of how the unions and NTUC can help union members at their workplace.

3 Union members may also sometimes face legal issues that go beyond the unions’ or NTUC’s purview and would need some form of guidance on how to

approach these issues. In order to serve these union members' needs, NTUC has been working in partnership with The Law Society of Singapore (The Law Society) to address their legal concerns. The Law Society has decided to make workers and their concerns the theme of The Law Society's Law Awareness Project this year and will collaborate with NTUC in providing legal talks to union members on these issues.

4 Kicking off this partnership with the launch of the "Law Awareness & U" initiative today, NTUC and The Law Society aim to provide useful legal information and help on work-related issues for union members through a series of free legal seminars and workshops this year. The first free seminar of the series held at the One Marina Boulevard Auditorium this evening attracted more than 550 union members.

5 The seminar on 'Corporate Restructuring and Employees' focused on how workers would be affected if their companies enter into scheme of arrangement, receivership, judicial management, insolvency, retrenchment, merger and acquisition. This is particularly useful for union members who may have concerns over these issues in view of the economic downturn. Subsequent seminars and workshops would have similar work-related themes including Law on Unfair Termination and Dismissal, and Contract Law and Restraint of Trade.

6 The Law Society's Pro Bono Services Office (PBS) provides free legal clinics and other pro bono initiatives like the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme to help the disadvantaged or needy on a regular basis. NTUC believes that collaboration with The Law Society would bring more value to union members.

7 Mdm Halimah Yacob, Deputy Secretary-General and Director, Legal Services Department, NTUC, said, "Our partnership with The Law Society makes sense as the Labour Movement has always been looking for innovative ways and partners who care to serve our union members in the areas of work, live and play. Our union members now would feel more relieved knowing that they have more access to pro bono legal help in times of need. The launch of this partnership, when Singapore is facing one of its worst economic crisis and when our workers are worried about their jobs, is truly a significant move."

8 Mr Harold Seet, Chairman of the Law Awareness Committee of the Law Society, said: "The Law Society has undertaken Law Awareness Projects since 1995 to promote knowledge of the law among members of the public. There is significant concern in the employment sector this year due to the uncertain economic climate and the Law Society will work with NTUC to provide guidance and information to union members on employment-related issues in the law."

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National Trades Union Congress

The Law Society of Singapore

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### **About National Trades Union Congress**

The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) is a national confederation of trade unions in the industrial, service and public sectors representing 500,000 workers in Singapore. NTUC comprises 61 affiliated unions, six affiliated taxi associations, 12 social enterprises and four related organisations. NTUC's objectives are to help Singapore stay competitive and workers remain employable for life; to enhance the social status and well-being of workers; and to build a strong, responsible and caring labour movement. NTUC's vision is to be an inclusive labour movement for all collars, all ages and all nationalities. For more details on NTUC, please visit our website at [www.ntuc.org.sg](http://www.ntuc.org.sg).

### **About The Law Society of Singapore**

Established in 1967, the Law Society of Singapore is a body established under the Legal Profession Act. It carries out various statutory functions prescribed under the Legal Profession Act, including maintaining and improving the standards of conduct and learning of the legal profession in Singapore, the facilitation of the acquisition of legal knowledge by members of the legal profession, and protecting and assisting the public in all matters ancillary or incidental to the law. For more details on The Law Society of Singapore, please visit our website at <http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/>.

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## Cases Studies of Union Members Receiving Help from Unions or NTUC

### A) Case Study 1

As the global economy took a spiral downturn in 2008, the electronics and electrical industry was among the first to be hit by the global slowdown. Many global and local companies in this industry faced severe reduction in customer orders and had to retrench their workers in order to survive.

The United Workers of Electronics and Electrical Industries (UWEEI) had encountered at least three major electronics/wafer fabrication companies in Singapore that had to retrench their workers over the last few months. Collectively, these three companies had retrenched 904 workers, including rank-and-file workers and executives.

Nonetheless, UWEEI had managed to negotiate fair retrenchment benefits for these workers, including one month of salary for each year of service, with a cap between 25 to 30 months, and help them find jobs in other companies and industries. UWEEI had also worked with these companies to tap on the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR) funding and send their remaining workers for training and skills upgrading.

### B) Case Study 2

A 63-year-old NTUC General Branch (GB) union member was given an extension of one year's service upon his retirement in December 2008. However, his company decided to terminate his services in January 2009.

Initially, he was given three months' notice but the company subsequently re-offered him an additional three months ex-gratia payment for early release from service.

The GB union member approached the NTUC GB Unit for help and the latter managed to speak with the company's Human Resources manager. With NTUC GB Unit's intervention, the company finally decided to give the GB union member one month's notice and pay him his salary till December 2009.

The GB union member is happy with the outcome, support and assistance provided by the NTUC GB Unit as he is able to recover about \$55,000 in salary payment (his monthly pay is about \$11,000).

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