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New fair employment guidelines published Reject any form of job discrimination, urges Halimah

By VINCENT WEE

THE new Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices give employers a guide to recruiting staff based on objective criteria while helping them to adopt progressive procedures to give employees opportunities for growth and development based on merit.

At the event to mark the guidelines' publication yesterday, NTUC assistant secretary-general Halimah Yacob said that people should take the cue and reject any form of discrimination.

She said: 'Every worker is entitled to a workplace free from discrimination where he or she, is assessed on merit and performance.'

She said that the new guidelines was part of the way Singapore chooses to encourage behavioural change on the part of companies rather than passing laws to force employers to comply. So far, over 400 companies have signed the Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment Practices, including 59 from the public sector, Mdm Halimah said.

Although job discrimination is not a big problem at the moment it could become a creeping issue with an ageing population, she warned.

A spokesman said: 'The number of employment-related discrimination cases reported to the Ministry of Manpower remains stable and is not alarming,' adding that the ministry had received about 60 to 70 such cases annually in the last three years.

'We have to not just deal with the symptoms but address the values at the heart of it,' Mdm Halimah said, adding that instances of ageism are still present and are becoming more covert.

There is no better time to initiate a change in norms and values than now, when the economy is buoyant and labour supply is tight, she said.

At human resources consultancy GMP, group chief executive Annie Yap said she was 'pretty positive' about the guidelines, but she still sees some resistance. Among her mainly multinational corporation clients in the manufacturing, IT and banking sectors there are still some concerns about older workers she said.

'It is important to educate clients to send out the right messages when they are recruiting people,' she said.

On the other hand, companies are also starting to realise that it benefits them to have fair employment practices as it helps in attracting and retaining staff.

The guidelines were issued by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices, which is co-chaired by Singapore National Employers Federation vice-president Bob Tan and Mdm Halimah. It includes employer representatives, union leaders and government officials.