

# Clinton gives tips to toilet champ

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Two weeks ago, Mr Bill Clinton and World Toilet Organisation founder Jack Sim talked toilets for half an hour in Hong Kong.

The occasion was the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) meeting, an exclusive gathering of do-gooders held every year in New York. This is the first time the conference has been taken outside of the United States, drawing luminaries like Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and President Gloria Arroyo of the Philippines.

After taking individual pictures with those who had gone to the meeting with specific "commitments" or pledges – Mr Sim included – the former American president showed the Singaporean his BlackBerry, which had an American tabloid report on the home-grown non-governmental organisation (NGO). He said he was very happy the organisation was on CGI's membership, said Mr Sim.

Mr Clinton, 62, told him he was "great golfing partners" with Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, and they once played till 4am. He even had a suggestion for Mr Sim's organisation, which champions sanitation issues: raise funds through sports TV programmer ESPN's Poker Championship and call it Royal Flush.

"I thought he was joking at first. But he went into detail of how this may be a good fit," said Mr Sim, 51.

He was invited to the CGI as a panellist in a food and nutrition crisis discussion.

Companies, philanthropists and NGOs which attend have to commit to doing something good. Mr Sim pledged on behalf of his organisation to provide better sanitation for the 2.5 billion people who do not have toilets.

The commitment is to drive demand for toilets among the poor, starting with villagers in Cambodia and India, and bring together suppliers, makers and financiers. It will set up a secretariat for this and is hunting for an executive director to head it.

He said building free toilets is not the answer, especially if the poor use them as storerooms. "They may not think they need a toilet," said the man who founded the organisation in 2001.

As many as two million people die each year from waterborne diarrhoeal diseases, due largely to poor sanitation.

With just 15 members at the start, the NGO has expanded to 151 member organisations in 53 countries. Staffed by seven paid employees and Mr Sim, a volunteer, it is funded by Singapore's Lien Foundation and several foreign donors.

The foundation has been giving the organisation \$100,000 a year since 2005. Mr Sim draws a salary from his own building materials company, which deals in toilet cubicles, lockers, auditorium seats and acoustic panels for ballrooms, and rent from four shophouses in Little India.

The Economic Development Board told The Sunday Times its international organisations programme office is in discussions with the organisation about funding the NGO's World Toilet College programmes, as well as the new initiative.

The college was started in 2005 to provide training in toilet design, maintenance, school and disaster sanitation.

Mr Sim believes the CGI initiative, which he plans to launch next year, will be a big hit – "2.5 billion people without sanitation is a problem, 2.5 billion people needing it is an opportunity."