

REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SINGAPORE TO THE UN AT PANEL SESSION “RECENT INITIATIVES TAKEN BY MEMBER STATES, UN SYSTEM AND CIVIL SOCIETY”, UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2018, 3 DEC 2018

Overview of Singapore’s Approach

- Singapore has from our independence set out to build a **fair, equitable and inclusive society**.
- Thus we have always understood the importance of ensuring the **integration, participation and dignity** of all our people.
 - These key elements echo the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We were working towards these goals long before the SDGs existed!
- As a state party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Singapore is committed to its effective implementation to ensure that no one is left behind.
- We are invested in building a society where persons with disabilities are **recognised, empowered and given every opportunity to achieve their fullest potential** and actively participate as **integral and contributing members of society**.
- Even before our ratification of the CRPD in 2013, **Singapore embarked on a national roadmap in 2007, the Enabling Masterplan**, which has been reviewed and renewed every five years.
 - These Masterplans chart the way forward in seeking to promote the **social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities** in Singapore. They also serve as an **anchor for our disability policies** and guide our **implementation of the CRPD**.
 - The first two Masterplans strengthened support for persons with disabilities in the areas of **early intervention, education, employment,**

mobility and accessibility, healthcare and the use of assistive technology.

- We are now on our **Third Enabling Masterplan**, which will guide our efforts for the period 2017-2021.
 - **Persons with disabilities, their caregivers, representative organisations and employers were involved in the development of this Masterplan.**
 - Singapore is **investing about \$400 million a year** to roll out new initiatives.

Singapore's Disability Policies

Recent Initiatives

- Let me give you an overview of some of our recent initiatives. Our principal focus has been on strengthening the **eco-system of support** for persons with disabilities and their families, to **improve their quality of life** and provide a **smoother transition across the various stages of their lives.**

Education

- We devote particular attention to the **early detection and intervention in children's developmental delays.**
 - This is crucial in ensuring that children can develop to their fullest potential. To support the wide spectrum of children's **special education needs**, Singapore also adopts a **differentiated approach** by placing them in the appropriate education setting that can best cater to their requirements.
- Our education policies encourage the integration of children with mild special education needs with their peers from a young age.
 - Those who have the cognitive and adaptive skills to learn in large-group settings learn alongside their peers in mainstream educational settings.
- As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure greater inclusiveness in our education policies, **all children with special educational needs born after 1st January 2012 will be included under our Compulsory Education Framework** with effect from 2019.

Employment

- Singapore firmly believes that **employment** is a key enabler that allows individuals to be independent and contributing members of society, and promotes social inclusion. We have thus sought to increase the capabilities, confidence and employability of persons with disabilities through access to **training and lifelong learning initiatives**.
 - **Employers are also encouraged to hire and retain persons with disabilities** through initiatives that defray employers' costs for apprenticeships, workplace modifications, job re-design and other forms of job support.
 - These efforts allow employers to focus on the abilities, and not the disabilities of individuals, and affirm the dignity of persons with disabilities through their engagement in meaningful employment.

Participation in Sports

- Beyond the academic sphere, in Singapore we recognise the role that **sport** can play in improving a person with disability's quality of life by helping to develop greater self-esteem and independence. Sport can also provide a universal platform through which persons of all abilities can participate and meaningfully engage with one another. It was in this spirit of inclusivity that Singapore developed its **Disability Sports Master Plan** to provide more opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in sport.
 - I am proud to share that our **Team Singapore para-athletes** have represented Singapore in many regional and international games. **2016 saw Singapore's largest contingent with 13 paralympians participating in the Rio Paralympics, who won 2 gold and 1 bronze medal and broke 2 world records in swimming.**
 - They have shown that persons with disabilities are productive contributors to society in their own right, and have inspired society through their ability to overcome difficult circumstances in the pursuit of sporting excellence.

Accessibility and Technology

- Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals aspires to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. To this end, we have been working to **improve the accessibility of Singapore's built infrastructure and services**, including our public transport system.

- For example, all subway stations and bus interchanges in Singapore are now barrier-free. By 2020, all our public buses will also be wheelchair-accessible.
- We have set up a technology facility, **Tech Able**, to spur new ideas and solutions to support education, employment and independent living and **make assistive technology more accessible**. Subsidies to help defray the high costs of assistive devices such as wheelchairs and hearing aids are also available.
- As we enter what many term the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is all the more **important that we leverage new technological developments** to better enable persons with disabilities to live, work and play independently.

Support for Caregivers

- While working continuously to create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities to fulfil their aspirations, we in Singapore have not forgotten those who care for persons with disabilities.
 - Caregivers are an important pillar of support for persons with disabilities. Yet, they invariably suffer from burn out and high levels of anxiety, as they work tirelessly to support those under their care. The need for self-care and mutual support among caregivers cannot be understated.
- Work is underway to establish a **network of support for caregivers** to provide information, planned respite, training, as well as links to peer groups' support and other agencies for further assistance.

Conclusion

- Beyond these wide ranging initiatives that the Singapore Government has put in place over the years, **building an inclusive society remains a collective endeavour** that needs to be undertaken by all segments of society.
 - To truly enable and empower persons with disabilities, a **fundamental shift in people's mind-sets** to recognise the abilities of persons with disabilities is needed.
 - We must also strive to **create shared experiences** to ensure the integration and active participation of persons with disabilities in all facets of society. Only then can we speak of truly inclusive societies and cities that leave no one behind.