

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOME OF THE 23RD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)

Part 1: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

The Singapore Government's goal for gender equality remains unchanged - equal opportunities for men and women on the basis of meritocracy. Built upon that is the availability of fundamental resources such as education and healthcare for all citizens so that men and women have the same opportunities to pursue their personal goals and gain access to all spheres in society.

Key Achievements

2 The Government has made significant strides in the advancement of women's issues and rights in Singapore. The following are some of the key milestones.

Change in Citizenship Law

3 In April 2004, the Singapore Parliament passed a bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore to allow overseas-born children to acquire Singapore citizenship by descent from their Singaporean mothers. Singapore deposited the notification to lift the reservation to Article 9 in July 2007.

Penal Code Amendments

4 The following amendments to the Penal Code came into force on 1 February 2008.

Protection of young persons against sexual exploitation for commercial sex

5 To enhance the protection of young persons against sexual exploitation for commercial sex in Singapore and in other countries, it is now an offence for a person (male or female) to purchase sexual services from another person (male or female) who is under 18 years of age.

6 To combat child sex tourism, it is an offence for a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident to purchase sexual services from a minor under 18 overseas. It is also an offence for a person to organise child sex tours or print, publish or distribute any information that is intended to promote sexual exploitation of minors under 18.

Withdrawal of marital immunity under certain circumstances

7 It is now an offence for a husband to engage in non-consensual sexual intercourse with the withdrawal of marital immunity under certain prescribed circumstances which signal a break-down in the marriage and consent to conjugal relations.

Equal Pay for Equal Work

8 In May 2006, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) was formed to encourage employers to adopt fair and responsible employment practices. The Tripartite Guidelines for Fair Employment was launched in January 2007 and the Tripartite Centre for Fair Employment was established in November 2007 to promote awareness of fair employment practices amongst employers and the general public.

9 The income gap between males and females has narrowed. The median monthly income for full-time employed females was 86% that of males in 2006, up from 83% a decade ago. However, female employees within the age group of 25-29 years earned more than males in occupations such as managers, technicians and associate professionals.

Enhanced Package of Measures to Support Parenthood

10 An enhanced package of measures to support parenthood was introduced in August 2008. The measures included longer maternity leave, extended childcare and infant care leave for both parents, infant and childcare subsidies and financial support for the family. These measures enable parents to strike a better balance between work and family life, pursue a range of childcare options and ease the overall financial costs on the family.

Amendment to Minimum Age of Marriage

11 In 2008, amendments were made to the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) to raise the minimum marriage age from 16 to 18 years for Muslim females. Like their non-Muslim counterparts, a Muslim below 18 years of age who wishes to marry will have to apply for a Special Marriage Licence.

Singapore's Work in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

12 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) came into force for Singapore on 4 November 1995. Singapore's Initial Report, Second Periodic Report and Third Periodic Report were submitted to the UN Committee on the CEDAW in January 2000, April 2001 and November 2004 respectively.

13 On 1 August 2007, Singapore presented the Third Report to the Committee. The delegation was led by Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

14 As a responsible member of the international community, Singapore takes a serious view of its international obligations to treaties such as the CEDAW. Apart from this Convention, Singapore is also a signatory to various other international human rights instruments, some of which are specific to women. Singapore is also a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) wherein women's issues attract major concern and discussions.

15 Treaties and Conventions do not automatically become part of the laws of Singapore unless they are specifically incorporated into the legal system. As such, an aggrieved party cannot invoke the provisions of the Convention in the law courts in Singapore.

Complaints Procedure With Respect to Violations of Constitutionally-Guaranteed Rights to Equality

16 Although there is no specific gender equality and anti-gender discrimination legislation in Singapore, the principle of equality of all persons before the law is enshrined in the Singapore Constitution. This provision encompasses the non-discrimination of women.

17 In Singapore, provisions have been made to allow any aggrieved woman to seek redress according to the laws applicable to that area. The rights of Singapore women are protected under the Constitution as well as in other legislation like the Employment Act, the Women's Charter, and the Penal Code. Women can report violations to the relevant authorities, which will look into the complaint, and take action to enforce the laws as appropriate. An affected victim, or someone on her behalf, can also lodge a police report.

18 Besides the legal channel, there are various other channels for women and women's groups to reflect their views and complaints, including views on the Convention. All Ministries and government agencies have formal channels for the public to raise complaints and to comment on policies that have an impact on them. All public complaints are recorded and the agencies' responses are monitored.

19 Citizens can write to the forum pages of local newspapers to express their views and debate policy issues. In addition, REACH (short for "Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home") organises regular dialogue sessions, tea sessions and policy forums to actively obtain the public's views on policies and legislative changes. Members of Parliament hold regular dialogue sessions with women's groups on issues concerning women. Women's issues and concerns are openly debated in Parliament.

Non-Governmental Organisations and Associations

20 The following 3 key women bodies represent more than 90% of women's groups in Singapore:

- (i) The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), which is the umbrella body for women's organisations in Singapore;
- (ii) The Women's Integration Network (WIN) Council under the People's Association, which runs programmes for women at the community level and provides leadership opportunities at the grassroots level; and
- (iii) The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Women's Development Secretariat, which represents the labour movement and champions women's interests pertaining to labour issues.

21 These 3 key organisations are a powerful resource as well as an important change agent for women in Singapore. The Women's Desk of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), partners and works with these apex bodies to address issues facing women in Singapore.

Engaging Men and Boys in the Promotion of Gender Equality

22 Singapore recognises that men cannot be alienated in the process of promoting gender equality education. Public education programmes involve men and boys and highlight their role in eradicating gender stereotypes and violence against women.

23 The Association of Devoted and Active Family Men (ADAM) and the Centre for Fathering, Singapore, promote such desired mindsets and behaviour. ADAM, registered in 2004, is committed to raising awareness of men's responsibilities and roles in the society, as fathers, husbands and individual members of the family. This vision is shared by the Centre of Fathering, which was formed in 1999. In 2007, it launched initiatives such as "10,000 Fathers Reading to their Children", "Back to School with Dad" and the "Great Dads of the Year" Competition.

24 In 2007, the White Ribbon Campaign, which was launched in Singapore in 2003 to eliminate violence against women, called for men to "Break the Silence, Stop the Violence". In January 2008, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) sponsored Singapore's first Men's Gender Awareness Group (GEMS) to encourage men to become part of the dialogue on the issues of gender equality and understanding.

Part 2: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

Education of Women

25 The Government remains committed to providing all Singaporeans, both girls and boys, with equal access to quality education. To realise this aspiration, the Government invests a sizeable amount for education annually. For example in 2007, 3.4% of Singapore's GDP (S\$7.5 billion or US\$5.5 billion) was allocated for education.

26 Singapore has achieved a high literacy rate for women. The literacy rate of resident females aged 15 years and over was 93.8% in 2007, up from 89% in 2000.

27 Female students make up more than half the full-time student intake at the local universities today. In addition, women are well-represented in traditionally male-dominated subjects. The intake of females to the following courses in 2007 reflect this:

- at the universities, women made up 80% of the health sciences course, 69.1% of the architecture & building course and 66.2% of the natural, physical and mathematical science course;
- at the polytechnics, women made up 78.3% of the health sciences course, 69.2% of the legal studies course and 62% of the science and related technologies course; and
- at the ITE, women made up 60.4% of the applied and health sciences course and 39.1% of the info-communications technology course.

28 To achieve the twin objectives of giving our children a core set of knowledge and skills, and providing a common educational experience, the Government has made six-year primary school education in national schools compulsory. This took effect with the cohort entering Primary One in 2003. In making primary school education compulsory, Singapore has in effect implemented Goal 2 of the UN Millennium Development Goals, i.e. to achieve universal primary education for boys and girls.

Removal of Intake Quota for Female Medical Students

29 In 1979, the National University of Singapore (NUS) set a one-third quota on the intake of female medical students because more female doctors leave the profession prematurely or switched to part-time work. This quota was lifted at the start of the 2003 academic year and now both men and women have equal opportunity to read medicine in NUS based on individual merit.

30 The policy change has resulted in a significant rise in the number of women enrolling in medical school. In 2007, 115 women were admitted to the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the NUS – making up nearly half of the cohort. In addition, three in four of the first batch of 26 new Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School students were women.

Women & The Economy

31 In 2007, 54% of the resident female population aged 15 and over in Singapore were in the workforce. Although the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) still lagged that of the males (77%), the gap has narrowed over the decade. In 1996, the corresponding LFPR were 78% for males and 50% for females.

32 Also, with the improvement in educational attainment, the proportion of corporate managers who are females rose from 24% in 1994 to 35% in 2007.

33 To further enable and empower women to make viable work options which harmonise their family and work commitments, the Tripartite Workgroup on Enhancing Employment Choices for Women was established in July 2007. The Tripartite Workgroup, chaired by Mdm Halimah Yacob, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and Member of *the Workers' Group of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Governing Body*, comprises representatives from the unions, employers and the Government. One of their initiatives was the “30 Minutes to Work” programme, which was organised in partnership with the Community Development Councils (CDCs). Under this initiative, non-working women were matched with jobs that are within close vicinity of their homes.

34 The contributions of women to job creation in Singapore are gradually increasing. In 2007, women made up 21,700 of the 94,100 employers in Singapore, which translates into 23.1 percent of the total number of employers. This is an increase from 20.1 percent in 2003, when there were 19,043 women employers out of a total of 94,951 employers.

Support for Working Women

35 Working Singaporeans enjoy the support of the Government, who actively promotes work life harmony. Family-friendly initiatives have been introduced to help women better integrate work-life.

36 In August 2008, the Singapore Government unveiled an enhanced Marriage & Parenthood (M&P) package to promote marriage and parenthood. The heightened emphasis on work-life balance in this package enables women to integrate their work, personal and family commitments. It is therefore deemed by many to be women-friendly because it addresses key challenges Singaporean

women face by facilitating better work-life balance through longer paid maternity and childcare leave for both parents and providing financial support for parents to raise and care for their children.

37 To many working Singaporean women, the main highlight of the M&P Package is the extended government-paid maternity leave, which is extended from 12 weeks to 16 weeks. New mothers have the flexibility of taking the last eight weeks of their maternity leave over 12 months from the birth of the child. There are other leave benefits, such as childcare and unpaid infant care leave.

38 Apart from the increased tax incentives for parents, working women also enjoy greater tax benefits from the Working Mother's Child Relief. The relief is 15 percent and 20 percent of the mother's earned income for the first and second child respectively, and 25 percent per child for the third and subsequent child, up to a maximum of 100 percent of the mother's earned income.

39 The enhanced Baby Bonus is also welcomed by many. The S\$4,000 cash gift for the first and second child and S\$6,000 for the third and fourth child help meet the increased expenses during pregnancy and birth. The Children Development Account, which is a dollar-for-dollar government matching contribution, helps pay for the child's educational and medical needs.

Women in Politics & Decision-making

40 Female representation in the Singapore Parliament has been increasing. Based on data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as at 30 Nov 2008, Singapore is ranked 38 out of 189 countries in terms of the percentage of women in the Lower or single House. Singapore's 25% of women in Parliament currently exceeds IPU's world average of 18.4 percent (both Houses combined).

41 Women have a choice in deciding if they want to enter politics. Although more women are increasingly holding their own in the economic sphere, many still shy away from politics due to the desire for privacy. While we have made progress, there is still more that we can learn from other countries on how to encourage more women to participate in politics. The Government is optimistic that as Singaporean women become more educated, more will consider entering politics. Such a change takes time, and Singapore remains committed to this long-term effort.

42 As at April 2008, 5 of the 23 Permanent Secretaries were female and there were 7 female Deputy Secretaries out of a total of 28. We now have eight female Heads of Mission and an almost equal number of men and women working in the UN Secretariat. A Singaporean, Ms Noeleen Heyzer, has been appointed the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Women & Health

43 The Singapore Government accords a high priority on healthcare. Aside from granting women equal access to healthcare resources, it also pays special attention to women's healthcare needs. These high standards are supported by the following figures:

- (a) Life expectancy at birth for women increased from 80.4 years in 2001 to 82.9 years in 2007; and
- (b) Singapore's maternal mortality rate is also amongst the lowest in the world, at 8 per 100,000 live and still-births in 2007.

44 Singapore not only grants women equal access to healthcare resources, but also pays attention to the special healthcare needs of women. Special attention is paid to female illnesses and programmes have been organised specifically for women such as subsidised breast and cervical cancer screenings.

Women & The Media

45 The Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) sets clear media guidelines prohibiting the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and sexually-discriminating values. In the case of broadcast media, the guidelines state that programmes should not make careless discriminating references to any class or group of people, whether based on race, gender, disability or occupational status. In addition, the guidelines regulate the behaviour of broadcasters by disallowing the use of insensitive jokes that might cause hurt to any persons.

46 The Free-to-Air Television Programme Code requires that programmes send a strong signal against any form of non-consenting sexual relations (for example rape or indecent assault). It disallows demeaning and hurting sexual stereotypes. Besides content guidelines that safeguard the interests of women, MDA also supports programmes that cater to women, such as "Rogue", a talk show which focuses on issues and trends concerning Singaporean women, and "Women on Top", another talk show which invites female celebrities and politicians to share their views and thoughts on current affairs, politics, entertainment and social issues.

47 The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) sets similar standards as MDA. There are guidelines that prohibit negative stereotyping that could potentially hurt any segment of society. Lewd slogans and suggestive pictures used to promote matchmaking services had already been axed from Singapore's newspapers and magazines in 2007. ASAS introduced stricter guidelines in March 2008 to specify that matchmaking ads must be in text (without pictures); the ads have to state that marriages are not guaranteed; and the ads are restricted to a certain section (classified section for advertisements)

of the newspapers and magazines. Only dating agencies accredited by MCYS were exempted from the guidelines.

Violence against Women

48 The Singapore Government does not tolerate family violence. Through the “Many Helping Hands” approach, Singapore seeks to nurture a violence-free environment for families -an environment that is safe, stable and supportive. Over the last ten years, Singapore has transformed the way it has managed family violence. Today, there is a comprehensive and holistic network of services which has enabled us to build a safe and nurturing environment for our families and children.

Inter-agency platforms

49 A key platform for the management of family violence in Singapore is the Family Violence Dialogue Group, established in 2001. The Group is headed jointly by MCYS and the Singapore Police Force. The Dialogue Group comprises the Courts, the Prisons, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the National Council of Social Service, and social service agencies such as the Society Against Family Violence. The Dialogue Group facilitates work processes amongst the agencies, coordinate public education efforts and develop new ideas for collaboration on family violence.

50 In 2003, six Regional Family Violence Working Groups, led by non-government organisations, were set up to harness community energy to spearhead regional activities, examine new trends at the grassroots level, and seek new ways to help families affected by violence. The Chairpersons of the Working Groups are appointed as members of the Dialogue Group to provide feedback to the Dialogue Group on gaps in services.

51 The Singapore Police Force continues to conduct regular dialogues and consultations with social workers based in Social Service Agencies. These dialogues, aimed at improving joint working processes and providing co-ordinated assistance to family violence victims, have resulted in joint public education efforts in the community and increased rapport between police officers and social workers. The results can be seen in the increase in the police referrals of family violence victims to Social Service Agencies (from 171 referrals in 2001 to 866 referrals in 2007). This resulted in timely interventions to provide support and care to victims, who are largely women and children.

52 Since 2001, on an annual basis, MCYS and its partners organise the National Family Violence Networking Symposium to strengthen partnerships and to share best practices in policy, practice and research. In 2006, distinguished speakers from neighbouring countries were invited to share their laws, programmes and services for families living with violence. In May 2007, the

Symposium had as its theme “Men and Family Violence: Mobilising Men; Mobilising Resources”. A distinguished keynote speaker from the United States as well as local experts were invited to share their programmes and services with the aim of understanding, engaging and mobilising men to end family violence. This was followed by a two-week publicity campaign in November where print, television, radio and poster publicity, roadshows and outreach talks at workplaces were organised to reach out to men.

Public Education

53 MCYS works with the media and magazines to educate the public on family violence through articles and advertisements. The focus has largely been preventive in nature, emphasising the identification of signs of family violence and the need to seek help early. Public education materials like pamphlets and collaterals have also been distributed widely through polyclinics, social service agencies, police, libraries and schools.

54 Efforts have been made to educate the young on healthy dating relationships beginning with upstream initiatives. MCYS collaborates with the Institutes of Higher Learning (polytechnics and universities) to jointly develop elective modules on mindsets and skills for healthy relationships, as well as train lecturers, students, counsellors and mentors with soft skills to handle students' relationship issues through regular Train-the-Trainers sessions. MCYS has been working with partners to raise awareness of family violence and avenues for help in schools through skits and video clips.

55 MCYS funds social service agencies for their public education projects, which include roadshows at shopping centres, polyclinics and primary schools.

Part 3: Institutional Development

Singapore's Judiciary System

56 Singapore has the international reputation of having a clean and efficient judiciary system, which has significantly contributed to its economic success by boosting investor's confidence in the country. For example, the Swiss-based Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness Yearbook has consistently ranked Singapore in the top two positions under the “sound legal framework” component. The Political and Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd in Hong Kong has rated Singapore as the economic entity with the lowest risk in Asia. And since 1966, Singapore has been in the top two positions for “quality of judicial and legal systems”.

57 The direct and indirect benefits of having a sound, corruption-free and efficient system are available to all Singaporeans, regardless of sex, age or ethnicity.

The Women's Charter in Singapore

58 The principle of equality for women is entrenched in Article 12 of the Constitution of Singapore which states that "all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law". For example, the right to vote was given to men and women at the same time in 1948.

59 The Women's Charter governs matters related to marriage and divorce. Enacted in 1961, it is a landmark piece of legislation that provides the legal basis for equality between husband and wife. Its comprehensive coverage includes the following:

- a. Polygamy: it forbids a Singaporean man from taking more than one wife;
- b. Management of Household: it gives equal rights and responsibilities to both husband and wife in the care of their children and home;
- c. Matrimonial property: it entitles the wife to a share of the matrimonial property even though she may not have contributed directly to it financially;
- d. Maintenance by Husband: it makes it obligatory for the husband to maintain his wife and children during marriage and upon divorce; and
- e. Family Violence: it protects the wife and children from a violent husband to the extent of removing him from the matrimonial home.

60 In August 1996, the Women's Charter was amended to cover four key areas, i.e.

- a. Protection of the family from domestic violence;
- b. Division of matrimonial assets;
- c. Enforcement of maintenance orders; and
- d. Legality of marriages.

61 Under the Women's Charter, the minimum legal age of marriage in Singapore is 18 years with parental consent. A person below 18 years of age wishing to get married has to apply for a Special Marriage Licence from MCYS before he/ she can marry.

Institutions for the Advancement of Women's Status in Singapore

62 Singapore has two main national bodies overseeing women-related matters. They are the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on CEDAW which was set up in 1996 to monitor Singapore's implementation of the Convention and the Women's Desk, which was established in 2002 as the national focal point for women matters. The Women's Desk is also the secretariat for the IMC on CEDAW.

63 The Women's Desk conducts gender analysis and analyses trends to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of gender-sensitive measures and policies. Gender-disaggregated data is collated from Ministries and agencies and published on the Women's Desk webpage. These readily-accessible statistics are a valuable resource for gender research and informs the public about the state of women locally.

Gender Analysis

64 In the formulation and review of policies, Singapore adopts a stakeholder approach which analyses the policy impact on affected groups. As many policy issues are cross-cutting, a "whole of government" approach is adopted whereby consultation with other relevant ministries are done before government agencies submit policy papers to Cabinet for consideration.

65 This stakeholder approach encompasses taking a gender-sensitive perspective on issues that have differing impacts on women and men. An example is in the treatment and response to Singapore's ageing population where health-related issues differ for men and women. Another instance is that older women tend to have fewer financial resources as a result of their lower educational levels and the tendency to disrupt their careers or drop out of the labour force for family reasons.

66 The perennial problem of low fertility rates has been an issue which is high on the Government's agenda. In 2008, the Government introduced a suite of marriage and parenthood measures to promote marriage and to boost the low birth rates. Views from various stakeholders were sought through public dialogues, feedback and focus group discussions. On 6 May 2008, the National Family Council (NFC) organised a focus group discussion with women's groups to seek their views on Singapore's marriage and parenthood concerns and measures. Areas for discussion covered marriage, work-life and childcare support.

Strengthening of Institutional Capabilities

67 The Singapore Government supports and facilitates the strengthening of institutional capabilities of the various agencies to enhance the status of women.

We believe that gender training is necessary to build capacity in gender analysis and planning as well as to increase gender awareness and sensitivity. Besides strengthening inter-Ministry cooperation through regular exchanges, IMC members are also invited to conferences and seminars on gender mainstreaming and CEDAW both locally and overseas to enable them to share their experiences and learn from the best practices of other economies. The Women's Desk has conducted briefings on Singapore's commitments to CEDAW.

68 In addition to national efforts, regional and international collaborations are valuable platforms to foster partnerships amongst different nations. Regular opportunities to discuss gender equality issues and gender mainstreaming help to generate greater awareness of issues facing women in the international arena, and also provide governments with the opportunity to coordinate efforts and share best practices and expertise to improve the lives of women around the world.

Participation at Regional and International Meetings

69 The Women's Desk actively participates in regional and international meetings on women. Led by Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Women's Desk participated in the Second China-ASEAN High Level Women's Forum in October 2008.

70 Singapore is APEC host this year, and MCYS will be hosting the 14th Women Leaders' Network (WLN) Meeting and the 7th APEC Gender Focal Point Network (GFPN) Meeting in partnership with various women's groups. The Meetings will be held in August 2009.

71 Aside from the APEC Meetings, the Women's Desk also participates in regional/ international meetings such as the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) Meetings and the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings (WAMM).

Part 4: Remaining challenges and actions to address them

72 The Singapore Government is committed to ensure that men and women are given equal opportunities in all spheres on the basis of meritocracy. In addition, we remain committed to achieving the goals set at the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to our obligations under CEDAW.

73 Moving forward, the Government will continue to foster strategic collaborations with relevant partners to equip women with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their aspirations and multiple roles in our society.

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