



**STATEMENT BY MS AUDREY SEAH
DELEGATE TO THE 40TH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
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Mr Chairman,

1. The Singapore delegation joins others in congratulating you and your bureau on your election. We are confident that under your able leadership, the work of this Commission will proceed smoothly and efficiently. We would like to assure you of our delegation's support and co-operation.

2. Singapore has the third highest rate of ageing in Asia. Only Japan and the Republic of Korea have higher rates. In Singapore, the number of persons aged 65 years and above will escalate from the current 8% of our population, to 20% in 2030. The pace of ageing will pick up momentum around 2011, when the first baby boomer cohort reaches 65 years. The economic burden on society will thus escalate, with our support ratio¹ projected to decrease from 1 elderly to 8.5 working-age residents in 2006 to 1 elderly to 3.4 working-age residents in 2030. Our low total fertility rate, which currently stands at 1.24 in 2005², will increase the socio-economic burden of an ageing population on the economically active members.

3. However, we believe that there are also many opportunities presented by an ageing population. Most older people will be healthy and ambulant. The challenge for us is to change the mindsets that with productive ageing, seniors are a resource, not a burden. We are optimistic that an ageing population will bring about a thriving silver industry too, creating economic benefits to our society while the increased range and diversity of available products and services will benefit our seniors as consumers.

Mr Chairman,

4. Five years ago, Singapore participated in the Second World Assembly on Ageing and adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 which called for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels in all sectors so that the enormous potential of ageing may be fulfilled. Today, I would like to reaffirm Singapore's commitment to mainstreaming ageing issues in the national agenda and to report on the efforts made by Singapore towards improving the lives of older people.

¹ Support Ratio is computed as the number of residents aged 15-64 years per elderly resident aged 65 years and over.

² Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore.

5. Since the 1980s, there have been several ministerial committees formed to look at ageing issues. The current Ministerial Committee on Ageing is chaired by a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, signifying the importance of a high level inter-ministry approach towards developing holistic policy directions for ageing. Within the framework of maximising participation, health and security for older people, there are four strategic thrusts for Singapore in response to our ageing population.

6. First, enhance financial security and economic participation of older people. Employment and employability of older persons are critical to give continued financial independence to seniors. If we succeed in increasing employment, this will reduce the economic burden and slow down the decrease in the support ratio. A tripartite committee on Employability of Older Workers was set up in March 2005 to recommend measures to enhance the employability of older workers and help them stay employed longer, and to positively shape the perceptions and mindsets of employers and the public towards the employment of older workers. In 2006, the Employment Rate for residents aged 55 to 64 was 53.7%, a significant 6.7 percentage-points higher than that in 2004. In absolute terms, this meant there were 40,000 more older people in employment. This is a significant positive progress for Singapore.

7. The second key thrust is to enable older people to age-in-place. A barrier-free accessible built environment and public transport system will enable older people to participate in economic and community activities. We have made some progress for our transport system. Since 2006, we have completed retrofitting all subway stations and they are barrier-free today. Also in 2006, the first wheelchair accessible buses were introduced. By 2010, 40 per cent of our bus fleet will be wheelchair-accessible. We are making efforts but more have to be done to implement barrier-free accessibility in Singapore.

8. The third thrust is to provide affordable healthcare and eldercare services in the community to help the elderly to age-in-place in the community. We strongly believe that the family is the bedrock of society, and will continue to be the first line of care for older people. Fortunately, in Singapore, family ties remain strong, but we acknowledge that the family is facing many stressors, and with smaller family size, caring for the aged is increasingly getting difficult. Hence, a comprehensive range of affordable healthcare and eldercare services for older people in the community will help the family care for older persons. Our approach is to work closely with the NGOs to provide community based care services and caregiving support services to help families who need to care for elderly persons.

9. As an illustration of how serious we are about the role of the family, Singapore has enacted the Maintenance of Parents Act in 1995 to provide a legal avenue for elderly parents to seek maintenance from their children. The Act places the obligation to support an aged person on his child, hence supporting the principle of "Family as the first line of support". We want adult children continue to support their aged parents financially and emotionally to ensure their well-being.

10. The last strategic thrust is Active Ageing. In 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, Singapore embarked on large scale public education on ageing. Since then, there has been much focus on active ageing and intergenerational bonding programmes. Moving forward, a new Council for Third Age will be set up to further promote active ageing, maintain greater physical and mental well-being among seniors, and encourage seniors to be as independent for as long as possible. The council will imbue positive perception of ageing and the elderly.

11. Given our demographic transistion, Singapore's commitment to productive ageing has gain greater momentum in recent years. If I may cite from the recently released AARP Multinational Survey of Opinion Leaders 2006, 'Population ageing is a high priority issue for most Singaporean opinion leaders'. Many older persons in Singapore do age with security and are increasingly being empowered to participate within their families and communities. But we acknowledge that today's world is still very youth-oriented. Much work remains to be done to change mindsets and perception of ageing. This is a global challenge. However, Singapore is hopeful that as our older persons get more educated and are healthier, they will continue to build on their knowledge and experience, and continue to contribute as productive members of the workforce. We are confident the perception of older people and population ageing will be increasingly positive.

Thank you.