



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Forty-ninth session

Summary record of the 993rd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 22 July 2011, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Pimentel

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Fourth periodic report of Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the members of the delegation of Singapore took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Binte Yacob** (Singapore) said that on 1 July 2011 the Women's Desk in the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports had been redesignated the Office for Women's Development, reflecting the growing importance and recognition of women's role in Singapore society. The task of advancing the interests of women and implementing the Convention was coordinated by an Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC).
3. The health-care system had been ranked by the World Health Organization in 2000 as the best in Asia and 6th in the world. Women's life expectancy at birth was among the top 10 globally. The under-5 mortality for girls was the second lowest in the world, adult mortality for women was third lowest, and the maternal mortality rate was 2.6 per 100,000 live births in 2010, one of the lowest in the world. The literacy rate for women was 93.8 per cent, and female students constituted more than half the full-time student intake at universities.
4. With stereotypes of women's roles disappearing, the labour force participation rate for women had increased from below 30 per cent in the 1970s to 56.5 per cent in 2010. In 2010, women represented half of the 270,000 workers trained under the Workforce Skills Qualification system, and 30 per cent of female workers ages 15 to 64 had engaged in job-related training or education. Women represented 25.3 per cent of employers, 56 per cent of the civil service, and 59 per cent of the top two categories of officers. Six of the 22 top civil service posts were held by women. More than half of the judicial officers in the Subordinate Courts and just under 20 per cent of the Supreme Court Judges were women.
5. Flexible work arrangements were becoming more common, as a result of government grants and the promotion of work-life integration. More means-tested childcare subsidies were being offered to working mothers.
6. Areas of challenge included ensuring that women's skills remained relevant and up-to-date, support for women in achieving work-life integration, creating infrastructure and measures to support elderly women, protection and welfare of women migrant workers, and the continuing fight against trafficking in persons.
7. On 30 August 2010, Singapore had ratified the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and had partially withdrawn the reservation against articles 2 and 16 of the Convention. A reservation was being maintained against specific elements of those two articles, in recognition of the need to protect the interests of the Muslim minority community.
8. As part of the process of ensuring that sharia law remained responsive to the interests of Muslim women in Singapore, the minimum age of Muslim marriage had been raised from 16 to 18 for both parties. Pursuant to several religious edicts (*fatwas*) designed to secure the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependants, surviving spouses had been recognized as legal owners of property held jointly with the deceased spouse. Central Provident Fund monies could now be received by a surviving spouse.
9. Since the consideration of the previous report in 2007, the number of women Members of Parliament had risen from 21.2 per cent to 22.2 per cent, exceeding the world average of 19.3 per cent. Paid maternity leave had been extended from 12 to 16 weeks, the eligibility period for maternity leave had been shortened from 180 to 90 days, and protection of pregnant employees from unfair dismissal had been improved. Childcare and financial support for families had been extended. The Government was continuing its focus on encouraging shared male-female childcare responsibilities, including paid childcare leave for fathers.
10. Penal Code amendments in effect since 1 February 2008 made it an offence to purchase sexual services from a minor under the age of 18, organize child sex tours, or print, publish, or distribute information intended to promote commercial sexual exploitation of minors. A January 2011 amendment to the Children and Young Persons Act of 1949 formalized licensing standards for children's and young persons' homes and harmonized penalties for sexual exploitation and other offences with those in the Women's Charter. Serious child sexual abuse cases could now be prosecuted under the Penal Code, which carried tougher penalties.

11. A January 2011 amendment to the Women's Charter, the legal basis for the rights and duties of spouses and women's rights in marriage and divorce, strengthened various procedures in those two areas.

12. Singapore's strategy to combat trafficking in persons consisted in prevention, prosecution, protection, and partnerships, and included establishment of an inter-agency task force and cooperation with other countries, civil society organizations, and the private sector to encourage victim reporting, information sharing, and safeguards for victims. Singapore was also an adherent to various international protocols, conventions, and global plans of action.

13. Measures to protect foreign domestic workers continued to be reviewed regularly. Minimum medical insurance coverage contributions by employers of foreign workers had been increased on 1 January 2010, and a new employment agency regulatory framework under the Employment Agencies Act had been introduced in April 2011 to raise the standard of recruitment practices and minimize abuses and malpractices — an important measure, since almost all foreign domestic workers were brought to Singapore through employment agencies.

14. The Government had taken steps to enhance health-care services for the growing numbers of elderly. Legislative measures had been enacted in 2011 to allow more people to continue working for a few years beyond the current statutory retirement age of 62. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) LIFE annuity plan had been introduced in 2009. The Maintenance of Parents Act (1995), which enabled needy elderly to obtain financial maintenance from their children, had been amended in November 2010 to improve and streamline procedures.

Articles 1 to 6

15. **Ms. Šimonović**, noting the absence of information about plans for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, asked for information about obstacles to its implementation. She also requested information on the submission of concluding observations and recommendations to Parliament, and the involvement of Parliament in the reporting process.

16. The dualistic legal system in Singapore made direct implementation of the Convention and the invoking of Convention articles in the national courts impossible, but she wondered if it was possible at least

to make references to relevant articles. She asked if the Government planned to consider a provision prohibiting discrimination based on gender, and potentially also sexual orientation, in keeping with article 1 of the Convention.

17. She requested information about why the Government considered it necessary to maintain partial reservations pertaining to certain articles. For example, the partial reservation to article 16, paragraph 2, appeared unnecessary since the legal age for marriage had been increased to 18.

18. **Ms. Schulz** noted that Singapore had not ratified most of the United Nations human rights treaties, the exceptions being the Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified with reservations. Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would strongly reinforce protection of women's rights in Singapore.

19. Article 12, paragraph 1, of the Constitution stated that all persons were equal before, and entitled to protection by, the law, while article 12, paragraph 2, restricted protection to citizens of Singapore and protected them only from discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, descent, and place of birth. She asked for an explanation of the relationship of article 12 of the Singapore Constitution to article 2 of the Convention, which protected all women from all grounds of discrimination.

20. The Penal Code criminalized consensual homosexual activity between consenting adult men but not between women. She asked if women were indirectly affected in their rights by that criminalization of male homosexual activity. Media Development Authority regulations prohibited positive or even neutral depictions of lesbianism, and violators of the regulations were fined. She asked for an explanation of how those regulations were reconciled with article 2 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 28, paragraph 1, which prohibited all forms of discrimination against all women, including on the grounds of gender orientation and gender identity; and how the Media Development Authority regulations were compatible with article 5 of the Convention, given the negative stereotyping of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

21. **Ms. Popescu** noted that as yet no human rights institution existed in Singapore, and that the Committee had recommended establishment of such an institution, in keeping with the Paris Principles (United Nations Human Rights Commission Resolution 1992/54 of 1992 and Resolution 48/134 of 1993), with a mandate to monitor compliance with the Convention and to address complaints of discrimination against women. In that regard, she asked for an explanation of the mechanism for filing complaints, given the absence of such an institution or human rights ombudsman.

22. Singapore still had no law prohibiting discrimination in general, and nowhere was there any reference to gender discrimination, yet the report and other sources indicated that numerous types of discrimination against women, particularly against various groups of disadvantaged women, were still prevalent. She asked if the Convention had been fully domesticated in national legislation.

23. **Ms. Hayashi** said that women's status in Singapore was important because the State party was responsible for showing that economic growth was compatible with gender equality. She asked for information about the budget earmarked for the Office of Women's Development and what percentage of the budget of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports was allocated to that Office.

24. According to paragraph 24 of the responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/S/SGP/Q/4/Add.1), many of the significant developments cited in the fourth report of Singapore had been effectuated through the work of the agencies represented on the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC). She asked for concrete examples indicating IMC decisions to abolish discriminatory laws, and for information about the level of coordination between the IMC and the Parliament.

25. She asked if the Office of Women's Development was engaged in any gender sensitization training for ministries, parliamentarians, member of the legal profession and law enforcement officers, and if it was taking steps to include non-Singaporean women who were under Singapore jurisdiction in the National Action Plan Gender and Equality 2008-2013.

26. **Ms. Binte Yacob** (Singapore) said that article 12 of the Constitution embodied the principles that all parties were equal, and were entitled to equal protection. The principles of non-discrimination on the grounds of marital status, age, disability, and national origin were

fundamental Constitutional guarantees, enforceable in the courts. The concept of non-discrimination on the basis of sex might be covered under that article. To date there had been no pertinent test cases in the Singapore Courts, but the pattern of cases in Commonwealth nations with constitutional provisions similar to those of article 12, paragraph 1, of the Constitution of Singapore, as well as local academic opinion, indicated that such a right of action was possible.

27. Despite the absence of specific gender equality legislation, the Government worked via legal and non-legal measures to address discrimination against women in the areas within the purview of the agencies represented on the IMC. For example, complaints of discrimination on the basis of gender in employment were covered under the Singapore Employment Act (1996, amended 2009). Other mechanisms existed for dealing with other issues. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) issued guidelines on fair employment practices for such situations. Concerns about other areas were covered by specific legislation.

28. In view of the dualistic jurisdiction system in effect in Singapore, treaties and conventions had to be specifically incorporated into domestic legislation in order to become part of national law. Suits could be brought before the high court by persons who felt that they had been treated unequally under an administrative or legislative measure.

29. The Cabinet, the Prime Minister, and the Office of Women's Development had been informed of the Committee's 2007 concluding observations and recommendations. The public had been informed via the Ministry website and at an informational meeting held on 2 October 2007. The IMC met regularly to review actions and update processes. Updates were monitored by the Office for Women's Development.

30. **Ms. Binte Abdul Aziz** (Singapore) said that because Singapore was a dualist jurisdiction, if an individual wanted to cite a substantive obligation under the Convention before a Singapore court, it was necessary to cite an equivalent domestic measure that secured the domestic enforceability of the relevant provision. Reference to the Convention in the Supreme Court was permitted. The courts did pay attention to pertinent international conventions when deciding cases.

31. Accession to the Optional Protocol had been considered after the Committee's comments and

observations in 2007. The decision against accession had been taken because it was the Government's understanding that the Optional Protocol was intended to strengthen domestic implementation of the Convention. Mechanisms applicable by the courts and by government agencies, Parliament, and the media already existed for dealing with complaints related to gender discrimination. The Government had provided information about those mechanisms in paragraphs 2.5 through 2.8 of the fourth periodic report of Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/4), and the mechanisms were kept under continual review to ensure application of the Convention.

32. **Mr. Ng** (Singapore) said that Singapore did not condone discrimination in the workplace. Under the Employment Act and the Child Development Co-Savings Act, employers were required to pay for maternity leave benefits if a female employee was dismissed without cause. The Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment (TAFEP) had been adopted in 2006 to guide employers and employees in fair employment practices. One of the TAFEP guidelines called on employers to recruit employees based on merit, skills and ability to do the job, regardless of age, gender, race or disability. The TAFEP approach had led to significant progress, demonstrated by the fact that only 0.2 per cent of non-working women cited discrimination as their reason for not working.

33. **Ms. Ong** (Singapore) said that article 2, subparagraphs a-f, article 16, paragraphs 1 (a), (c), (h), and (j), and article 16, paragraph 2 of the Convention were still subject to reservations. Every development in the sharia required that the Muslim community must understand the context and reasons for reform. Major educational activities had been undertaken by the respective agency in close partnership with stakeholders. The Government was currently of the view that certain portions of the domestic framework for the practice of sharia required the reservations to be maintained for specific elements of articles 12, 2, and 16.

34. **Mr. Hadi Bin Mohd Shuhaimy** (Singapore) said that with respect to the sharia rules relevant to article 16, paragraphs 1 (a), (c) and (h), and 2 (a), of the Convention, although written law still permitted polygamy, the practice had decreased markedly and currently accounted for only 0.08 per cent of all marriages. Applications for polygamous marriages were considered by the Registry of Religious Marriages (ROMM). The first wife could appeal the ROMM

decision to permit the marriage, and she was allowed to file for divorce.

35. Written law required a woman to have a *wali* (guardian) for her marriage, but she could ask the *kadi* (the registrar authorized to register a Muslim marriage) to be her *wali hakim* (a *kadi* appointed to act as guardian to give away the bride in marriage) when the *wali* did not agree to her choice of spouse.

36. With respect to article 16, paragraph 1 (c), of the Convention, men could seek divorce from their spouses by the pronouncement of *talak* (pronouncement three times of the formula of divorce).

37. Women could seek divorce on the grounds of *taliq* (breach of conditions of marriage contract), *fasakh* (divorce on grounds specific in Islamic law), and *khuluk* (divorce by mutual consent).

38. The *iddah* (waiting period before remarriage) applied to a divorced woman and not to a man, but the man could not register a new marriage before the end of the *iddah* required of his ex-wife.

39. With respect to article 16, paragraph 1 (h), of the Convention, the administration and disposition of property and inheritance practices differed for men and women, but both the Government and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) were continually reviewing practices and *fatwas* (religious edicts), including the *fatwa* on joint tenancy (2008) and the *fatwa* on the Central Provident Fund (updated in 2010).

40. With respect to article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention, the minimum marriage age for Muslims was now 18, and while marriage of girls between 16 and 18 was still permitted, special permission of the *kadi* was required, and such marriages were an exception. Since 2002 there had been no marriages of girls or boys under 16. The Government, in partnership with religious organizations, was actively educating the Muslim community on the implications of marriage at a young age and raising the awareness of gender issues. Prenuptial counselling was required for young couples.

41. Islamic law did not condone homosexuality or gender reconstruction surgery, but persons engaged in such activities were accorded the rights and obligations, of members of the community and were treated as such.

42. **Ms. Binte Yacob** (Singapore) said that non-ratification of the human rights treaties and other treaties and conventions was an indication not of lack of adherence to their principles, but rather of recognition of the need for further study and consideration. Continuous review was an ongoing process by all ministries involved, and ratification for its own sake was to be avoided.

43. The establishment of a national human rights institution was a matter of process. The goal, achievement of gender equality, was being achieved by an existing mechanism, the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC), which monitored cross-ministry activities and acted as coordinating committee for all issues pertaining to women and gender equality and compliance with the Convention. An example of its coordinating function related to the 2008 decision on childcare leave for parents, in which the cross-ministry discussions involved all the ministries affected. The reason for the redesignation of the Women's Desk as the Office for Women's Development was that it was looking at new "niche" issues specific to certain segments of the female population.

44. **Ms. Ong** (Singapore) said that 56 per cent of civil servants were women, a situation that provided greater diversity of point of view in formulating policies. Civil servants at all levels received structured training in taking into account the impact of policies and programmes on the various stakeholder groups, including women. That approach led the Ministry to take a gender perspective on issues that affected men and women differently. There was an increasing requirement for consultation with the various stakeholders that would be affected when legislation and programmes were undertaken. Law enforcement officers were trained in how to handle female suspects. A code of conduct existed for judges and prosecutors.

45. **Ms. Neubauer** said that it appeared that a number of ministries — including in particular the Ministry of Finance — were not represented in the membership of the Inter-Ministry Committee which would not appear to be in line with the stated policy of having a "whole government" approach to gender equality. She asked for clarification whether gender mainstreaming was really applied throughout all Government departments and in all policies.

46. Referring to the assertion that women in Singapore were not perceived as a disadvantaged or

marginalized group warranting special attention, she said that while progress had been made with regard to the representation of women in public and political life, Singapore was still far from achieving a gender balance in positions of elected office, decision-making and leadership. Women's equality in political representation and influence could only be achieved if the social and cultural context was effectively addressed. Special temporary measures to address the situation did not constitute positive discrimination or preferential treatment of women. The central problem being addressed was not the disadvantage of women but the existing unfair privilege of men in society. She asked whether any substantive debate had been held on temporary special measures and whether there were any plans to introduce such measures to address the underrepresentation of women on the boards of public organizations and public companies and to ensure equality for women with disabilities in the labour market.

47. **Ms. Açar** said that in her capacity as a professor of gender equality, three things she always emphasized about the Convention were that it applied not only to equality of opportunity, but also to equality of results; it pertained to both the public and the private spheres, in both the economic and sociological senses; and that the backbone of the Convention was the obligation to modify discriminatory traditional cultural norms and stereotypes. In that regard, it was of concern that women in Singapore seemed so occupied with their physical appearance — the country's beauty industry (including the use of surgery and pharmaceuticals) was booming, with the support of the media. Such a focus on appearance simply put a new face on the traditional stereotype of women as sex objects, and the trend should be examined critically, from the perspective of gender equality. She asked whether there had been any efforts to regulate the beauty industry, with particular regard to advertising and the media. The Committee would appreciate further information on any proactive measures the Government had taken to address gender stereotypes.

48. The Committee had received information from alternative sources suggesting that the National Family Council still promoted the notion of men as heads of households. She asked what measures the Government had taken to ensure that such entrenched cultural conceptions of men were being eliminated from the people's mindset. She would be interested to hear

about any concrete results that had been achieved through educational and awareness-raising campaigns implemented since 2007.

49. Although she welcomed Singapore's partial withdrawal of its reservation to article 16, she asked for clarification of the country's interpretation of article 5 on combating gender inequality and stereotypes, in light of its remaining reservations to article 16 and article 2.

50. **Ms. Gabr** once again encouraged Singapore to study best practices in other Muslim countries with regard to their interpretation of sharia law, in order to find a solution that enabled women fully to enjoy their rights in accordance with articles 2 and 16 of the Convention, while preserving their cultural specificities.

51. With regard to the question of migrant workers and Singapore's status as a destination for trafficking, she expressed concern over the perception of domestic workers and the difficulties they faced. Although acknowledging the efforts made by the Government, she urged it to consider ratifying the new International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189). Regarding the Inter-Agency Taskforce that had been set up to deal with trafficking, she asked whether it worked with non-governmental organizations or the private sector. As the legal definition of trafficking in Singapore was very restrictive, she asked whether the Government would consider adopting a new law containing a broader definition and considering the human rights perspective, using a victim-centred approach. She suggested setting up a compensation fund for victims of trafficking, as existed in many other countries. She would also appreciate further information about shelters and rehabilitation for victims, as well as witness protection. It was disturbing to note that alternative sources had suggested that victims of trafficking were often deported to their countries of origin. Her particular concern stemmed from the fact that the number of trafficked persons was increasing and that, given the current economic climate, that trend might continue. She acknowledged that Singapore was studying the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol), and asked for clarification of the time frame envisaged.

52. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that since Singapore was a country with an emerging economy, its citizens — both men and women — should have employment opportunities that guaranteed their rights. Referring to article 5 of the Convention, she asked about provisions for paternity leave, particularly in relation to men's continued recognition as heads of household according to the National Family Council. While welcoming the increase in maternity leave in Singapore, from 12 to 16 weeks, she emphasized that article 5 was clear that both partners shared responsibility for childcare.

53. Even though both men and women were able to undertake military service in Singapore, most women did not; she asked whether that meant that men received greater benefits in the workplace later in life.

54. Reports from non-governmental organizations had suggested that there was a large matrimonial industry that sold foreign women as "products" in Singapore, often including offers of domestic service with marriage. She asked whether there were any plans to regulate private marriage agencies. In particular, the Committee had received reports that wives needed to obtain their husbands' consent to separate.

55. She asked whether the Government was taking any measures to ensure that divorced women, single mothers and widows were treated equally. She also asked for more information about measures to combat and/or monitor violence against domestic workers.

56. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that, even though significant measures had been taken to implement the provisions of article 5 in a number of areas, there was no evidence of any existing laws specifically incorporating the article into the legal system. In light of general recommendation No. 19 on eliminating stereotypes and prejudices, she asked for information on how a victim of gender stereotyping could demand that article 5 must be given proper effect in Singapore. She would also like to know whether there were any plans to incorporate those provisions into the legal system.

57. She asked whether the Government envisaged introducing an anti-discrimination law to protect women and girls from bias on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, race, status, descent, place of birth, or religion and whether it could envisage the possibility of removing censorship of homosexuality from media codes and policies, since the media had great power to reinforce prejudices. Lastly, she asked

whether the Government would consider the possibility of amending the domestic violence law and extending its protections to include de facto and same-sex couples.

58. **Ms. Jahan** commended Singapore for its commitment to suppressing the trafficking and exploitation of women, but noted that the measures taken to translate that commitment into actions still fell short of requirements. While Singapore was using the definition of trafficking contained in the Palermo Protocol as its own working definition, alternative sources had suggested that in practice, trafficked persons were still being criminalized as irregular migrants and could thus face deportation without any protections. In that context, few victims were likely to report a crime. The report also suggested that substantiated cases of trafficking were rare, but other sources had said that there were many cases and indeed that trafficking in women was growing. The narrow definition that was being used failed to address the non-relevance of consent and did not recognize forced labour. In that context, the majority of women trafficked to Singapore risked not falling under the necessary protections. She asked how Singapore planned to integrate the definition of trafficking as provided in the Palermo Protocol into its national legislation.

59. She would like to know whether the Government planned to introduce a comprehensive anti-trafficking law covering all the elements of its current strategy — prevention, prosecution, protection and partnership — and including a gender dimension, and what the timeline would be. The creation of the Inter-Agency Taskforce was welcome, but she asked for more information about its mandate — did it have a role in monitoring the implementation of anti-trafficking measures and did it have mechanisms for regular labour inspections to identify potential victims of trafficking? Noting that Singapore's primary strategy to address trafficking was to implement strict controls on migration and prevent the movement of irregular migrants into and out of the country, she asked whether the Government was planning to increase avenues of legal or "managed" migration. It was important to bear in mind that the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons had noted that restrictive immigration policies helped generate a lucrative market for trafficking.

60. Turning to the question of foreign domestic workers, she asked whether the Government was planning to enact separate legislation to protect their rights, since the Employment of Foreign Manpower

Act only addressed issues relating to work permits. In addition, foreign wives were often at risk of being trafficked into the country, falling prey to unscrupulous international marriage brokers. Were any special measures planned to address that question?

61. **Ms. Rasekh**, stressing the importance of stopping demand rather than concentrating on prevention, asked what measures had been taken to reduce the demand for commercial sex in Singapore. She would appreciate more information about efforts made to inform migrant workers on the legal resources and remedies available to those who fell victim to exploitation and educate them on protecting themselves. Anti-trafficking public awareness campaigns would surely fall under the remit of "prevention", one of the country's stated strategies. She would also appreciate information about any awareness-raising activities being undertaken for police and immigration officers. She asked what funding was being allocated to non-governmental organizations that could provide such education and training. Sources had suggested that there were only three shelters in Singapore for victims of trafficking; she wondered whether there were any plans to provide funding for more shelters or safe houses. Although the Employment Agencies Act prohibited charging job-seekers who came to Singapore, it had been reported that some agencies charged thousands of dollars, thus keeping foreign workers in debt for a long time. As a result they were subject to forced servitude and could not leave. She asked what legal actions and educational programmes had been undertaken in that regard.

62. **Ms. Awori** said that although the report stated that Singapore was already using the definition of trafficking as outlined in the Palermo Protocol, there were significant gaps between the definition of trafficking used in the Protocol and that contained in the legislation of Singapore. It had come to the Committee's attention that the sections of the Penal Code on trafficking dealt with kidnapping, enslavement and the buying and selling of minors for the purpose of prostitution. That fell short of the full definition of trafficking contained in the Protocol, so the cases being addressed might be only the tip of the iceberg and trafficking might be much more widespread. She asked whether any training was being conducted for law enforcement officials and the judiciary with regard to the Protocol, prior to its ratification, or on its broader definition of trafficking. She also asked for further information about how the effectiveness of the

anti-trafficking measures in place was being monitored and assessed.

63. **Ms. Binte Jacob** (Singapore) said that Singapore took the issue of trafficking seriously and recognized that efforts needed to be stepped up to increase vigilance and responsiveness. Legislation and resources — including the Penal Code, the Women’s Charter, and the Children and Young Persons Act — had been put in place to prosecute offenders, enabling Singapore to target traffickers operating overseas as well as those inside the country. Legislation on abandonment and criminal conspiracy covered all acts leading up to the commission of the primary offence of trafficking. While Singapore was not a party to the Palermo Protocol, it was using the definition of trafficking contained therein for the purpose of its anti-trafficking operations.

64. Foreign victims reporting that they had been trafficked would not be treated as criminals. Indeed, police already worked under the assumption that those arrested on suspicion of soliciting might be victims of trafficking and might not be working voluntarily. As long as persons informed the police that they had been trafficked, or the officers identified possible elements of trafficking, the police would investigate and prosecute that crime. That was also true for those who had come to Singapore to work willingly but had been deceived or held against their will. A checklist containing 12 behavioural indicators and an interview template had been produced to help law enforcement officers determine whether a person was a victim of trafficking. The country also had a specialized crime branch for vice, which covered the trafficking of women for commercial sexual exploitation, staffed by experienced and well-trained officers. All persons suspected of involvement in vice-related activities were thoroughly interviewed in specially designed facilities, to determine whether human trafficking was involved. The questions used were available in foreign languages and interpreters were present whenever necessary.

65. Singapore provided assistance to victims, including Family Service Centres with crisis shelters, providing victims with temporary accommodation, protection, assistance programmes and emotional support. With regard to the question of whether three shelters was sufficient, she said that the situation was constantly monitored and feedback from the three shelters showed an occupancy rate of around 80 per cent. If necessary, more shelters could be established for victims of trafficking and violence against women.

Victims could call the National Family Service Centre helpline or the police to be admitted to one of the crisis shelters, which had links with medical and psychological services. Any organization that had information on suspected cases of trafficking had a duty to come forward to the relevant authorities so assistance could be provided.

66. With regard to the discrepancy in the number of reported cases, she acknowledged that there were difficulties in collecting data. The Government worked closely with foreign embassies in Singapore and asked them to report cases of trafficking that came to their attention; however, often due to the reluctance of victims, cases were not always followed up by the embassies. The Inter-Agency Taskforce would look at further refining those reporting processes so that the perpetrators could be prosecuted.

67. Singapore’s new Criminal Procedure Code, which had come into effect in January 2010, allowed judges to award compensation to victims. The Government would monitor its implementation to gauge its usefulness.

68. The country’s approach to trafficking was proactive, working to gather intelligence and develop leads on syndicates with a view to disrupting their activities and arresting the perpetrators. More than 40 per cent of the trafficking cases investigated by the Singapore police in 2010 had arisen from proactive investigations. Likewise, approximately 60 per cent of the Ministry of Manpower’s inspections on foreign-worker-related labour infringements had arisen from intelligence and proactive raids.

69. The new Inter-Agency Taskforce would coordinate all anti-trafficking initiatives and policy alignment within the Government. It also worked closely with civil society organizations that worked with victims. Another of its responsibilities was to develop a national plan of action on trafficking and raise awareness among women who might be at risk of becoming victims of trafficking.

70. **Ms. Tan** (Singapore) said that the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons had identified proactive upstream problem-solving as an area that could be strengthened, which would involve working with the relevant stakeholders to target trafficking syndicates operating in source countries. That included measures to enhance cooperation with embassies, foreign police forces, non-governmental organizations and the media, to refer victims to the authorities in

Singapore, to raise awareness of trafficking among potential victims, and to work on public awareness campaigns.

71. Singapore was part of a regional education campaign against child sex tourism, an initiative by ChildWise among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Australia. The campaign also encouraged the reporting of child sex tourism, which was closely linked to sex trafficking.

72. Singapore was working to target both the supply and demand for commercial sex. Strict border checks and enforcement aimed to disrupt supply, while tough law enforcement sought to reduce demand. However, since all commercial sex workers might be victims of trafficking, all those suspected of commercial sex work were interviewed and those who identified themselves as victims of trafficking were treated accordingly. In 2010, 94 commercial sex agents had been arrested and the police had conducted over 3,608 operations targeting the commercial sex industry.

73. **Mr. Ng** (Singapore) said that Singapore took the well-being of foreign domestic workers seriously, undertaking regular reviews of legislation and its effective enforcement, as well as education and outreach. The country would not hesitate to prosecute employers who abused foreign domestic workers. The Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) included extensive coverage of rights and took into account the working conditions of foreign domestic workers. All employers were responsible for the welfare of their foreign domestic workers and any who did not take the necessary measures could be charged with criminal negligence and fined up to \$5,000 and/or face 6 months in jail. The number of substantiated cases of abuse had fallen from 157 in 1997 to 42 in 2010, and over the past two years, five employers had been prosecuted for endangering the lives of foreign domestic workers. In 1998, the Penal Code had been amended to enhance the penalties against employers or members of their households by one and a half times.

74. Responding to the question about employment agency fees, he said that the issue was covered in the EFMA. The fee that employment agencies could charge had been capped at one month's salary per year of the employment contract or "work pass", whichever was shorter, up to a maximum of two months' salary. In addition, agencies were required to refund workers 50 per cent of any fee charged if employment was

terminated by the employer within six months. Overall, Singapore had a strong regulatory framework and good terms of employment, which made it an attractive destination for foreign domestic workers. The Ministry of Manpower had conducted interviews with more than 900 such workers in 2010, the majority of whom had said that they were satisfied with their work in Singapore; 70 per cent had indicated that they intended to continue working in the country, and almost 90 per cent were aware of their employment rights and obligations.

75. Singapore took its international obligations very seriously and would ratify the International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention when it was fully compliant with its provisions. It agreed with the principles it contained, but further review, in-depth discussion and consultation with stakeholders was required on many issues pertaining to the protection of domestic workers. A review of current legislation was under way, to assess the adequacy of existing protections for foreign domestic workers and the sufficiency of offences and penalties. The provisions of the Convention would be taken into consideration, where applicable.

76. **Dr. Liew** (Singapore) said that the Ministry of Health had adopted a multi-pronged approach to health promotion and education. In partnership with schools and health-care institutions, programmes were available that focused on self-esteem and positive body image. Programmes focusing on emotion management and dealing with change were also available to students, helping them to increase their confidence and manage challenges positively.

77. Medical practitioners could be subjected to disciplinary action by the Singapore Medical Council if they flouted professional guidelines, including those regarding aesthetic practice. Licensed clinics were required to comply with the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act. Although there were no such regulations governing non-medical establishments such as beauty parlours, the Committee's concerns had been noted.

78. With regard to the information provided about their services, medical practitioners and licensed clinics were subject to the Singapore Medical Council's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines and the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics (Publicity) Regulations. Information had to be factual, not

misleading and could not solicit or encourage the use of an institution's health-care services. Under the Medicines (Advertisement and Sale) Act, only licensed health-care institutions could advertise medicines, appliances or remedies for treating diseases listed in the Schedule or advertise any medical skill or service. For non-medical establishments, the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore had been established to promote ethical advertising and could refer any complaints it received to the Consumers Association of Singapore for action to be taken under the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act.

79. **Ms. Ong** (Singapore) said that the Government of Singapore recognized that men and women had shared roles and responsibilities in a family. For statistical purposes, the head of household was defined as the person who was generally acknowledged as such by the other members of the household, usually either the oldest member, the person earning the main income, the owner/occupier of the house, or the person who managed household affairs. In the 2010 census, households had been able to decide for themselves who to designate as head — either the man or the woman — the term was gender-neutral in that respect. In addition, efforts had been made in recent years to introduce policies and programmes that supported the importance of role-sharing in the family. The Women's Charter set out equal partnership between husbands and wives in the care of their home and children. The "wife relief" benefit had been renamed "spouse relief" and childcare leave had been made available to both fathers and mothers. During the first year of implementation, 30 per cent of fathers had taken at least three days' paternity leave. In the past two years, a public education "Dads for Life" movement had been launched to promote active fatherhood by highlighting the benefits of greater paternal involvement to child development, equipping fathers with the relevant skills. The movement was beginning to bear fruit and the Government was working with schools and community organizations to raise awareness and provided resources for appropriate programmes.

80. Responding to the question about national service, she said that while only males were required to serve, there was no rule excluding women from serving in the military if they so wished. There was no sense that having men perform national service reinforced gender stereotypes and it was not true that men earned higher wages as a result. In fact, in 2009, females

aged 25-29 earned a higher median gross wage than their male counterparts in many white-collar jobs — up to 24 per cent higher for those in sales and service positions, 7 per cent in managerial posts and 5 per cent for professionals — since they typically entered the workforce two years earlier.

81. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore) said that matchmaking agencies in Singapore were registered by the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority. While the industry was not regulated, agencies could apply to be accredited by the Social Development Network when they were fully compliant with standards. The accreditation system sought to build up standards, credibility and trust. Agencies also had to abide by advertising guidelines, endorsed by the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore, which included that all persons must be portrayed in a manner that was respectful of their dignity; no person should be commoditized; advertisements should not guarantee marriages; advertisements were restricted to the classified sections of print publications; and advertisements should not contain visuals.

82. **Ms. Binte Yacob** (Singapore), with regard to the composition of the Inter-Ministry Committee, said that the work of the ministries not represented was not directly relevant to the Convention, but they could be consulted if issues relating to their work were being considered. Any proposals requiring resources beyond the budget of the individual ministries concerned were discussed with the Ministry of Finance, even though it was not represented on the Committee. However, it was important to note that the current Minister of Finance was in fact the Minister of Manpower and the Deputy Prime Minister as well. The Committee could rest assured that the question of resources was not being neglected.

83. Turning to the question of temporary special measures, she said that such measures would be needed if there was a serious situation that needed to be addressed in order to achieve equality. However, Singapore had already made progress in the fields of education, health and employment by using fundamentally gender-neutral policies, which had encouraged the full participation of women. More than 50 per cent of university undergraduates were women. There had previously been a quota in place for medical students but it had been lifted some years ago, in light of the progress made. Women had excelled in certain areas: the civil service was comprised of more than

50 per cent women, including in the higher levels of management, where the rate was 59 per cent. Individual women had also made their own contributions to the advancement of gender equality — indeed there was a Singaporean woman at the head of a United Nations Agency. Therefore, it was her delegation's view that additional temporary measures were not necessary.

84. **Ms. Schulz** noted that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights both dated back to 1966; she therefore wondered what was preventing their ratification.

85. Reiterating her question about the legal situation of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, she asked whether Singapore planned to repeal article 377 (a) of its Penal Code, and urged the delegation to respond to her question about media regulations in relation to article 5 of the Convention.

86. She asked whether civil suits were expensive and whether women could obtain legal aid to cover the costs of court proceedings. Lastly, she requested further clarification on the domestic implementation of the Convention.

87. **Ms. Šimonović** asked how the provisions of the opening paragraph of article 2 — condemning discrimination against women in all its forms — would be incorporated into the relevant national laws. On a related note, she would also appreciate clarification as to why Singapore maintained its reservation to article 2, subparagraph (a), since it seemed to be in line with article 12 of Singapore's Constitution on the principle of equality between women and men.

88. **Ms. Açar** said that her question about heads of household had not been about the prevailing legal rules but rather about the prevalent values and attitudes in society and policies being implemented to change those attitudes. In addition, according to the criteria used to determine the head of household in the last census, as cited earlier by the delegation, she would be interested to know what percentage of heads of household were men.

89. **Ms. Murillo de la Vega** said that while the delegation had stated that the marriage industry was in compliance with requirements, in practice there had been reports of an enormous demand for younger women to fulfil traditional roles. She asked whether the Government regulated or monitored enterprises working

in the marriage industry. Immigrant women marrying Singaporean men represented 60 per cent of marriages in the country and the husbands had to sponsor the women's immigration; in her view the system ought to be changed.

90. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** welcomed Singapore's partial withdrawal of reservations, particularly to article 16. The participatory process during which the country had considered the Committee's concluding observations, as described in the responses to the list of issues and questions, was exemplary.

91. She asked whether there were any women on the Islamic Religious Council and whether there were women in leadership roles in the wider Muslim community.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.