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Ms Yakin Ertürk
UN Special Rapporteur on
Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
c/o Ms L. O'Hanlon
Fax: +41 22 917 9006

Dear Ms Ertürk,

I refer to your letter of 16 August 2005, seeking information on UN member states' policies to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women.

I am pleased to enclose a paper prepared by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports of Singapore on the integrated management of family violence in Singapore for your report to the 62nd session of the Commission on Human Rights.

Yours sincerely,

FAITH GAN
Second Secretary

THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN SINGAPORE

The Singapore Government does not tolerate family violence. Through the "Many Helping Hands" approach, Singapore seeks to foster a violence-free environment for families through working closely with governmental and non-governmental agencies, and the community. This approach underlies the social service delivery mechanism and espouses the principle that the various agencies, including the government, the community and families, should work together in concert and partnership to tackle social issues in Singapore

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

2 The Women's Charter passed in 1961 to protect the rights of women and girls in Singapore provides the legal basis for equality between husband and wife and also provides protection for family members from family violence. In 1996, amendments were made to the Women's Charter to give greater protection to women and children against violence. The amendments include the expansion of the definition of family members as well as the definition of family violence to include emotional and psychological harm. Other significant amendments include the ability of the Court to issue a personal protection order on the principle of 'balance of probability', rather than 'beyond reasonable doubt', that violence has occurred or is likely to occur. This encouraged victims to come forward for protection. A breach of the PPO is a seizable offence under the Criminal Procedure Code and is punishable by law.

3 Any person who wilfully contravenes a protection order or an expedited order is liable to a conviction to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or to both and, in the case of a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both. In cases where the perpetrator has caused substantial physical hurt to the victim(s), charges may be brought against him/her under the Penal Code.

Mandatory Counselling Programme for family violence cases

4 Under section 65(5) of the Women's Charter, when making a Personal Protection Order, the Court can order the perpetrator, victim and/or family member of a victim to attend counselling or any other related programme such as rehabilitation or recovery programme for perpetrators or victims of trauma. The aim of the **Mandatory Counselling Programme** is to rehabilitate the perpetrators and give support to victims and their children to ensure their safety and protection. Counselling sessions cover topics such as anger and conflict management and understanding the cycle of violence to help clients break that cycle. With mandatory counselling, victims are also empowered as they learn how to formulate safety plans for themselves and

their children. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) administers and funds the Programme. Under the Programme, families are referred to social service agencies for counselling. Attendance is compulsory and non-compliance can constitute a contempt of Court.

5 As an extension of the programme, MCYS piloted a joint scheme with the Singapore Prisons Service, Family Court and Pasir Ris Family Service Centre in June 2005 to allow offenders in penal institutions to receive counselling to prepare them to return to their home and to cope better in terms of their familial relationships.

STATISTICS

6 The number of applications for Personal Protection Orders (PPO) has seen a gradual decline from 2001 – 2004. See table below for the number of applications for PPOs per year:

	2001	2002	2003	2004
PPO Applications	2,974	2,944	2,783	2522

Source: Subordinate Court, Singapore, 2005

7 The number of PPOs being issued has seen a similar decline and it is postulated that this is due to the success in networking and preventive education as families that seek help earlier may not need to resort to taking the legal route.

MULTI-SECTORAL RESPONSE

8 A multi-sectoral response under girds the family violence management system in Singapore. The lead agency for supporting families at risk or in distress is MCYS. The Ministry plays a key role in setting the policy and service delivery frameworks for the management of family violence. It coordinates and works in partnership with key ministries, the police, healthcare professionals and social service providers to provide comprehensive and effective services for those affected by violence. This multi-sectoral response is established at various levels.

9 At the policy level, 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, Chairpersons of Regional Family Violence Working Groups, the National Council of Social Service¹, and social service agencies. The Dialogue Group is a strategic development and planning policy group to enhance provisions and services for

¹ The National Council of Social Service is an umbrella body for social service agencies in Singapore.

families affected by violence through facilitating work processes amongst the agencies, coordinating public education efforts and developing new areas for collaboration on family violence.

10 At the operational level, the National Family Violence Networking System was established in 1996 to put a tight network of support and assistance into place. The island-wide networking system essentially provides multiple access points for victims to obtain help. This system links the Police, Prisons, hospitals, social service agencies, the Courts and MCYS.

11 The Singapore Police Force conducts regular networking meetings with social workers based in social service agencies. These networking meetings are aimed at improving joint working processes and providing co-ordinated assistance to family violence victims. Such efforts have resulted in joint public education efforts in the community and increased rapport between police officers and social workers. The fruits of the growth of the police-social worker network can be seen in the increase in the police referrals of family violence victims to social service agencies from 171 referrals in 2001 to 943 referrals in 2004, resulting in timely interventions to provide support and care to victims, who are largely women and children.

12 Regional Family Violence Working Groups were set up in all regions in 2003/2004 with the objective of harnessing community energy to spearhead and plan joint regional activities to raise awareness of family violence, examine new trends at the grassroots level, enhance service delivery to families affected by violence and act as a conduit to provide feedback to the Family Violence Dialogue Group. The Working Groups include agencies from hospitals, the Police Force, crisis shelters, elderly care services, and Family Service Centres. Since their formation, the Working Groups have been prolific in their efforts in raising awareness, providing inter-agency training and initiating projects to better serve their clients and community.

13 Another platform for the multi-pronged approach to family violence is in providing updates in the field through the regular issues of a newsletter for agencies in the field of family violence and child protection. This was launched in October 2003. Entitled "Networkz - Agencies Uniting Against Family Violence," it aims to provide agencies with updates in the regional family violence networking system in events, programmes, trends, training and resources available locally, as well as to share the challenges and successes in the field. The newsletter serves to facilitate sharing of current and best practices to spur the agencies to seek new ways to serve the families affected by violence in their constituencies even better.

Manual on Integrated Management of Family Violence

14 A common understanding of how to assist family violence cases was established through a manual, coordinated by MCYS in 1999. Updated in February 2003, the manual spells out the protocol, procedures, roles, and responsibilities of each partner agency in the networking system. The manual reflects the government's

and non-government sectors' shared goal of working in partnership to develop a seamless approach in serving families in violent relationships and in preventing family violence. The manual also includes services for elder abuse, the role of crisis shelters and the prisons in rehabilitating perpetrators.

Police Management of Family Violence Cases

15 The Police regularly review and improve their management of family violence cases. In March 2003, a new guideline required Investigation Officers to give notice to victims or social workers on the release of a family violence perpetrator from police custody, prior to the perpetrator's actual release. The rationale for this guideline is to prevent a recurrence of violence against the victim by giving the victim or social worker more time to better protect the victim, including making alternative accommodation arrangements, where necessary.

16 In November 2004, the Police collaborated with 2 social services agencies on a Joint House Visit Programme. The objective of the Programme is to minimize reoffending by breach of Protection Orders Offenders by providing social services and conveying the message that the State remains interested in preventing relapses via paying home visits by Police Officers and Social Workers to recently released offenders and victims.

Role of the Subordinate Courts

17 The Family and Juvenile Justice Centre of the Subordinate Courts of Singapore also plays a significant role in the systemic approach in handling family violence cases in Singapore. There is an intake section at the Family Court to serve applicants of protection orders, who would receive an assessment on their safety needs once the application is filed. In some cases, the victims are given free medical and legal help, and referred to crisis shelters. At the hearing of the family violence case, the victims can also choose to testify via video-conferencing if he or she fears confronting the perpetrators directly. The Family Court also runs a Volunteer Support Person programme to offer assistance to victims of family violence to help them through the emotionally-trying court process, by accompanying them during court hearings and giving them emotional (as opposed to legal) support.

18 KIDS-Line (Kids In Difficult Situation), an interactive CD-ROM, has been developed by the Court to help children explore the issues of family violence and divorce, and to give them information on how to get help and understand the feeling that surface in such situations. It is used during group work sessions conducted by teacher-counsellors for primary school children. A video called "Shattered Lives Broken Dreams" explains the services available in the court process to assist the victim in walking through the court procedures. The Court has also partners the Police and MCYS in many public awareness events aimed to increase awareness of the availability of protection orders, thereby enhancing access to the Singapore judicial system.

Specialised Services

19 At the community level, a specialized programme providing a continuum of services to the victims and perpetrators of violence, called the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVE) was launched in 1999. PAVE provides remedial, preventive and developmental services. The programmes are specially catered to assist children who are witnesses or victims of family violence by attempting to break the vicious cycle of family violence through intervention, remedial and empowerment. The programme targets all family members who use or experience violence from a holistic framework.

20 Perpetrators with violence issues may approach the Family Services Centres for assistance, or may also be referred to the Community Addictions Management Programme (CAMP) at the Institute of Mental Health. CAMP working together with the Family and Juvenile Justice Centre and RPD, launched Project SAVE in March 2002. This project aims at counselling and rehabilitating perpetrators on their violence issues resulting from the influence of alcohol. By 2004, Project SAVE has also started to manage violence cases resulting from drug and gambling addictions.

Crisis Shelters

21 For victims requiring temporary accommodation, crisis shelters offer protection, practical assistance, and emotional support to help them overcome feelings of isolation, develop self-confidence, make decisions and take control of their lives. Crisis shelters also help victims to work out plans for their future and assist them to obtain alternative accommodation and employment where necessary.

22 A Programme Evaluation System was developed in January 2004 to evaluate the services of crisis shelters together with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). NCSS oversees the development and enhancement of service standards to safeguard the interests and welfare of service-users. The standards also ensure professionalism and accountability in meeting social service needs. The development of the System is part of the Ministry's strategy to include a check-and-balance to identify service gaps and areas for improvement.

Training for Professionals

23 The Ministry funds training for social service professionals to maintain professional standard in service delivery. The training allows professionals to acquire competency in knowledge and skills in working with family violence clients. Our partners from social services agencies also run annual training for frontline police officers to help them deal more effectively with victims and perpetrators.

PUBLIC EDUCATION EFFORTS

24 To educate the public on the sources of help, MCYS together with our partners promote public awareness on family violence. The focus of the public education initiatives has largely been preventive in nature, emphasizing strengthening families, the identification of signs of family violence and seeking help early.

25 MCYS works with the media and magazines to educate the public on family violence through articles and advertisements. Family violence advertisements and stories have been in magazines targeted at women, families, children, teenagers and Chinese and Malay readers. Information on help on interpersonal violence is also available on the eCitizen website (<http://www.family.gov.sg/stopfamilyviolence>). The website explains the different forms of abuse and provides tips and advice on where victims and perpetrators can obtain help. The Ministry produced a CD-ROM in February 2004 which introduces new personnel in agencies to the legal provisions and services for families affected by violence.

26 Public education materials like pamphlets, posters and collaterals have been distributed to inform victims and perpetrators of the availability of community resources. Major events to raise awareness about family violence include public forums, a play on spousal violence, a mini-walkathon, a logo competition, exhibitions at various shopping centres, and talks conducted at social service agencies, libraries and schools. Efforts have also been made to educate adolescents on healthy dating relationships. To reach out to young people, a play on dating violence has been shown to over 27,500 students in secondary schools, junior colleges and Institutes of Technical Education. The play aims to help teenagers spot and deal with the symptoms of dating violence. By involving both girls and boys in addressing the issue of violence in relationships and educating them of the wrong doing of such acts from a young age, the play seeks to prevent young persons from going down the path of family violence in the future.

27 MCYS also provides funding and matchmakes partners to reach out to the community through various community events. The co-funding scheme has supported social service agencies in organizing forums and programmes to educate their community. Some projects that have been carried out this year include a ski which reached out to 11 600 secondary schools students, a video on intra-familial elder abuse, a campaign to educate the elderly on elder abuse, and production of pamphlets and collaterals in preparation for the White Ribbon Campaign which also involves a workshop by Michael Kaufman in November.

CHALLENGES

28 With the system well in place, one of the areas key challenges is in changing public perception and attitudes towards violence. A study on family violence conducted in 2002 indicated that more could be done in educating the public

especially in the areas of psychological and emotional abuse. The study indicated that most people did not consider some forms of emotional abuse (such as frequent and prolonged criticism) as family violence. Respondents were most likely to associate family violence with physical violence. Many still viewed family violence as a 'private affair' that should be resolved within the family. This perception might lead to victims being reluctant to seek help, or deter concerned family and friends from reporting violence or abuse. The challenge for public education would be to change these perception and mindsets.

CONCLUSION

29 In the last eight years, Singapore has transformed the way it has managed family violence. Today, there is a comprehensive and holistic network of services where trained professionals intervene in family violence cases sensitively. The Singapore Government is committed to eradicate family violence and to continually examine and enhance our service delivery in the management of family violence with the strong support and partnership from across the sectors.

*Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Singapore
October 2005*