

SPS FAISHAL REAFFIRMS MORE PROGRESS AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN SINGAPORE

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, presented Singapore's Fifth Periodic Report at the 68th Session of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The presentation took place on 25 October 2017 (10am UTC) at the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland.

2 Country Rapporteur for Singapore's review, Miss Yoko Hayashi, commended Singapore for the remarkable progress made since the last CEDAW review. While noting that there will always be room to improve, several other CEDAW Committee Members also registered the progress and advances made by Singapore.

3 During the engagement with the Committee, Associate Professor Faishal took the opportunity to highlight Singapore's practical and outcomes-based approach to the realisation of human rights, bearing in mind our unique national circumstances and aspirations. He proceeded to elaborate on Singapore's efforts under two thrusts: (i) to continue eliminating barriers for women at the workplace, within the community and at home; and (ii) to strengthen efforts to empower vulnerable groups of women.

Eliminating barriers for women

4 Associate Professor Faishal said that in order to eliminate barriers for women, mind-sets need to be changed. This starts at home where the Government has been promoting marriage as an equal partnership. Leave provisions for fathers were enhanced, to encourage men to share parenting responsibilities. The Government also works closely with the Centre for Fathering, through the Dads for Life movement, to encourage active fathering and raise awareness of men's roles and responsibilities as fathers, husbands and individual members of the family.

5 Women now have better support and more options to help balance work and family commitments. Schemes (e.g. WorkPro Work-Life Grant) have been put in place to encourage companies to offer flexible work arrangements to them. This is also extended to husbands and fathers to encourage them to play their part. The Government is ramping up childcare capacity especially in estates with many young families, and expanding eldercare

services to support working caregivers. Mothers returning to the workforce after a break can also tap on SkillsFuture initiatives to upgrade their skills.

6 Associate Professor Faishal also shared that Singapore has been constantly reviewing the practice of Muslim law to ensure that religious practices are progressive and suited to the community in multi-religious Singapore. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, or MUIS, also regularly consults and engages community stakeholders to facilitate understanding and acceptance of gender equality. Consequently, our Muslim community has adopted more gender-equal practices, placing Singapore in greater compliance with our CEDAW obligations.

7 To strengthen women's representation in leadership positions, the Diversity Action Committee was set up in 2014 to champion and bring more women onto corporate boards in Singapore. As of June 2017, women's representation on boards of companies listed on the Singapore Exchange was 10.3%, up from 8.3% in 2013.

Supporting and Empowering Vulnerable Groups of Women

8 Associate Professor Faishal also spoke on the Government's targeted assistance for groups of women who require more support. For example, to help elderly women better meet their retirement needs, the Government has made it easier for Central Provident Fund (CPF) members to transfer CPF savings to their spouses. Seniors with little or no savings may also receive Silver Support pay-outs. To allow our elderly women to age comfortably at home, home- and day-care capacity has also been doubled.

9 Associate Professor Faishal reiterated Singapore's commitment to eradicating violence against women, and shared on the legislative framework and systems in place to protect women. The Women's Charter, Penal Code and Protection from Harassment Act, are in place to protect women from violence and harassment. The Women's Charter was enhanced in 2016 to protect victims of family violence and professionals engaged in protection work. The National Family Violence Networking System also provides multiple access points, for victims to obtain help.

10 A photograph of Associate Professor Faishal at the 68th UN CEDAW Session and a copy of his opening and closing statements are attached in **Annexes A, B and C** respectively.

ISSUED BY

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

26 OCTOBER 2017

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68th UN CEDAW Session



Singapore Delegation presenting Singapore's Fifth Periodic Report on 25 October 2017

National Archives of Singapore

**OPENING STATEMENT BY A/PROF MUHAMMAD FAISHAL IBRAHIM,
SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND
FAMILY DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

Wednesday, 25 October 2017, 1000 HRS, UN Office, Geneva

Madam Chair,
Distinguished Members of the CEDAW Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

I am Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Senior Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Ministry of Education. My delegation and I are grateful for this opportunity to share with you the progress made by the Singapore Government in implementing our CEDAW commitments, during the review period since 2009.

2. My delegation comprises officials represented on our Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW, which is responsible for monitoring Singapore's implementation of CEDAW. We have Ambassador Foo Kok Jwee, our Permanent Representative to the UN – Geneva; Dr Lee Tung Jean, Chair of the Inter-Ministry Committee; Ms Diane Tan from the Attorney General's Chambers, Ms Caryn Lim and Ms Eileen Lai from the Ministry of Manpower; Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir and Ms Nurhannah Irwan from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore; Mr Deculan Goh from the Ministry of Home Affairs; as well as Dr Alvin Tan, Ms Tan Bee Lan and Ms Tiffany Wong from the Office for Women's Development in the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

**SINGAPORE'S APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE PROGRESS OF
WOMEN**

Madam Chair,

3. The Government is fully committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights of our citizens, including women. Singapore enables the fulfilment of these rights effectively, bearing in mind Singapore's national circumstances and aspirations. The lives of women in Singapore have improved tremendously over the years. The latest UN Gender Inequality Index ranked Singapore 11th out of 159

countries, and second in Asia.¹ Life expectancy at birth for females is 85.1 years², higher than men. Our infant and maternal mortality rates are amongst the lowest in the world. Literacy rate for women is 95.4% and half of our university graduates are women. The employment rate for women aged 25-64 has increased from about 63% ten years ago, to 72% last year.

4. Singapore takes a practical and outcomes-based, and not an ideological approach to the realisation of human rights. To effectively implement our CEDAW obligations in Singapore, we take a coordinated “whole-of-government” approach in advancing the status and well-being of our women. Each agency represented on the Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW is responsible for implementing and monitoring initiatives to address women’s needs under their respective domain. Where there are cross-cutting issues, we come together to work through them. Hence, we do not have a single Ministry or government department that focuses on gender equality. This approach may differ from other countries, but it has worked well for us. The Inter-Ministry Committee is in turn supported by the Office for Women’s Development in the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The Office is also the national focal point for women matters in Singapore.

5. Our progress would not be possible without the concerted effort between the public, private and people sectors. In particular, we acknowledge the efforts of our civil society organisations. The agencies on the Inter-Ministry Committee actively engage the respective civil society organisations dealing with issues under the agencies’ domain. The agencies gather feedback from the civil society organisations and work with them in implementing various initiatives to address the needs of women. In addition, before we submitted our report in 2015, and prior to this oral presentation, we held various consultation sessions with women’s groups and women parliamentarians to gather feedback. They are very passionate and doing very good work in championing the needs of women in Singapore. I believe the Committee has met some of the NGO representatives in the past few days. The Government will continue to engage the NGOs and work with them to advance the progress of women in our country.

6. Since our last CEDAW review session in 2011, we have introduced new laws like the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and the Protection from Harassment Act, as well as enhanced several laws like the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act and the Women’s Charter. We have also introduced new policies like leave provisions for fathers and new programmes like an income supplement scheme for poor seniors. I will elaborate further later. All these changes afford greater protection of the rights of women and also allow our women to further progress in our society.

¹ Singapore scored 0.068 on the latest United Nations Gender Inequality Index. This is on a scale of 0 to 1, where 1 is total gender inequality.

² This is compared to 80.6 years for men in 2016.

7. Singapore adopts a practical approach to the realisation of human rights. Human rights are realised within a specific cultural, social, economic and historical context. Singapore firmly applies the rule of law to ensure stability, equality and social justice, which are necessary conditions for respecting the fundamental human rights enshrined in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We focus on delivering good socio-economic outcomes through pragmatic public policies.

SINGAPORE'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH TO CEDAW

Madam Chair,

8. Allow me to say a few words to set in context Singapore's legal framework and how we go about implementing our obligations under CEDAW. Singapore is a parliamentary republic with a written Constitution, which is the supreme law of Singapore. The principle of equality is enshrined in Article 12 (1) of our Singapore Constitution³. This encompasses the non-discrimination of women. So if any woman is aggrieved by a legal provision that allegedly discriminates against women, she can apply to the courts to seek a judicial review of that legislation.

9. In addition to the Constitution, Singapore implements its CEDAW obligations through legislation, policies and programmes. There is legislation that protect the rights of women in specific areas, like the Women's Charter, etc. There are also Government programmes and initiatives that specifically benefit women or benefit women more. For example, we have a Women's Health Committee to champion women's health. These legislation, policies and programmes undergo regular review to ensure that they remain progressive and meet the needs of our society.

COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

Madam Chair,

10. The Singapore Government is firmly committed to the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as espoused by CEDAW. To date, we have submitted five periodic reports and an interim report to the Committee, documenting our progress over the years. We have given serious consideration to the Committee's previous recommendations and have taken significant measures to enhance compliance with our CEDAW obligations. When we acceded to CEDAW in 1995, we placed reservations to a number of articles. Since then, we have reviewed and removed some of them. For example:

³ Which provides that "All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law."

- a. In 2007, during our second presentation, we announced the withdrawal of our reservation on Article 9 on nationality.⁴
- b. At our last presentation in 2011, due to developments in the practice of Muslim law in Singapore, we withdrew some reservations against Articles 2 and 16.
- c. More recently, after a thorough review in 2015⁵, we reported in our Fifth Report the withdrawal of our reservation on Article 11, paragraph 1, on equal rights in employment. This is an important development since our last CEDAW review session.

11. We assure the Committee that we will continually review our CEDAW reservations, taking into account the needs of our society and our CEDAW obligations.

12. Singapore firmly believes in the advancement of our women and the importance of their active participation in our country's development. Our core principle of meritocracy means that every woman enjoys equal standing and opportunities. Our focus is on creating and promoting an enabling environment with opportunities for women to achieve their fullest potential. Let me highlight our effort under two thrusts: First, it is imperative to continue eliminating barriers for women at the workplace, within the community and at home. Second, we will continue to strengthen efforts to empower women who may be vulnerable and have less opportunities than others.

ELIMINATING BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, COMMUNITY AND AT HOME

Changing mind-sets, attitudes and expectations

Madam Chair,

13. In order to eliminate barriers for women, we need to address the root of the issue, which is to change mind-sets, attitudes and expectations. We have made significant progress on this front since our last review. I would like to report that women made up 29.0% of research scientists and engineers in 2014, up from 26.5% in 2009. Today, we have around 1,500 uniformed servicewomen in the Singapore Armed Forces – compared to 2010, women recruitment per annum has doubled today. Our women also made up 18% of our Singapore Police Force and 44% of our Foreign Service Officers. Women made up 46.1% of judicial officers in the States Courts, 64.0% in the Family Justice Courts, and 50.0% in the Supreme Court.

⁴ This followed the amendment of our Constitution in 2004 to allow a child born overseas to be a citizen by descent as long as the child's mother is a Singaporean.

⁵ We had placed this reservation to safeguard the welfare of our women and their unborn children from certain hazardous occupations like the military. Over the years, our human resource policies have since progressed to be consistent with Article 11, paragraph 1.

14. We however also know that changing mind-sets takes time, and community involvement and acceptance is critical. Take Muslim law for example. Muslim Law in Singapore is set out in the Administration of Muslim Law Act, or AMLA in short. It is administered by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, or MUIS in short, the Syariah Court and the Registry of Muslim Marriages. We continue to maintain some reservations against Articles 2 and 16 to protect the rights of minorities in the practice of their personal and religious law, which is important in our multi-racial and multi-religious society. This allows for the operation of Muslim law in Singapore.

15. Nevertheless, we have seen much progress. Over the years, Muslim law in Singapore has been reviewed. Consequently, our Muslim community has adopted more progressive and gender-equal practices. MUIS has also brought the practice of Muslim law into greater alignment with civil law. The committee on religious edicts of MUIS⁶ meets regularly to discuss points of Muslim law, review current practices and recommends new measures to ensure that our religious practices are progressive and suited to the community in multi-religious Singapore. Since our last CEDAW review session, we have introduced two new religious edicts to secure the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependants by providing more options in inheritance matters. Muslims need not therefore be limited to classical Islamic inheritance law in which men are apportioned a greater share of the inheritance than women.

16. Several recent AMLA legislative amendments⁷ have also been made since our last CEDAW review session to accord wives with the same rights as their husbands to manage and administer the husband's property after his death, just as how he has the rights to administer hers. These changes have placed us in greater compliance with our CEDAW obligations.

17. There are a few other areas in AMLA that we need to work on. However, we need time to change mind-sets and culture. It would be counterproductive if we move at a pace that is faster than what the community can accept. Hence, MUIS holds regular courses, workshops and community engagement amongst the religious fraternity to raise awareness of CEDAW principles such as gender equality. In this way, we can move forward in a steady and sustained manner. We also believe in encouraging conversations amongst the various communities to provide different perspectives to facilitate understanding. MUIS will also continue their effort to increase the discussion on gender issues in Islam through consultation and collaboration with the women's groups. MUIS is committed to a progressive religious

⁶ This is MUIS' Fatwa Committee. It is an independent body of Muslim scholars, appointed by the president of Singapore to deliberate on issues affecting the administration of Muslim law.

⁷ This includes AMLA amendments to Sections 116 and 117 which allow for the court, if it thinks fit, to permit women beneficiaries to become sole administrators of a deceased man's estate. These amendments will eliminate differential treatment of the administration of a husband's estate viz. a wife's, and remove any doubts that a woman is incapable of managing and administering a property independently. In addition, Section 125 is repealed such that possessions of the wife will no longer be held prima facie to belong to the husband, in the event that the husband has outstanding debts and are being sought by his creditors. This sends a strong message that a wife is an independent individual and her assets are recognised as hers alone.

life for Muslims in Singapore and this includes a continual review of the practice of Muslim law.

Madam Chair,

18. Another area that we need to work on is to encourage both men and women to share the caregiving and household responsibilities. Women tend to take on more caregiving responsibilities or play a greater role at home. However, for women to progress in the workplace and in society, we need to have a cultural shift and mind-set change, especially about the sharing of caregiving responsibilities. This means encouraging men to step up and take a more active role at home.

19. We have been raising awareness of men's responsibilities and roles as fathers, husbands and individual members of the family. For example, we work closely with the Centre for Fathering, in catalysing the Dads for Life movement to encourage active fathering. We emphasise that marriage is an equal partnership.

20. To further encourage greater shared parental responsibility, we have introduced leave provisions for fathers since our last CEDAW review session, and have progressively enhanced them over the years. For example, fathers can tap on the two weeks of Government-Paid Paternity Leave. Working fathers can also share part of their wives' maternity leave, subject to the wife's agreement.

21. Our effort has borne some fruits. Perception is slowly changing. Our 2016 Marriage and Parenthood Survey found that 99% of married respondents agreed that fathers and mothers are equally important as caregivers for children, and 95% agreed that both parents should share the responsibilities of the home equally.

Providing More Options for our Women

Madam Chair,

22. It is also important to provide more options for our women, and men, so that they can pursue what is important to them – be it career, family, or both. Whichever option they choose, we should respect these choices and help them make the best of it.

23. To help workers balance their career and familial commitments, we encourage companies to offer flexible work arrangements to their employees. We have implemented various initiatives since our last CEDAW review session. In 2013, we introduced the WorkPro Work-Life Grant to defray employers' costs of offering work-life strategies. In 2014, our Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy⁸

⁸ The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy (TriCom), which comprises members from government agencies, tripartite partners and employers, promotes work-life practices, in particular FWAs, as a strategy to optimise business performance and facilitate employees to manage their own work-life fit.

launched an Advisory to guide employers, employees and supervisors on effective implementation of flexible work arrangements at their workplaces. The results are encouraging. In 2016, 67% of employees worked in firms that offer formal flexible work arrangements⁹, up from 56% in 2011. In the same year, 82% also worked in firms that offered ad-hoc flexible work arrangements, up from 72% in 2011. In addition, the tripartite partners have recently launched a Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements to further raise adoption of such arrangements.

24. We are also building capacity to support our women and men to fulfil their caregiving responsibilities. Working couples who have just started a family may need support in caring for their young children. Hence, we have been improving the quality, accessibility and affordability of our pre-school services. All parents receive child care and infant care subsidies. From 2013 to March 2017, the number of child care places increased by more than 40,000 places, surpassing the target of 20,000. The Government will continue increasing child care capacity, especially in estates with many young families. We have also strengthened our efforts so that caregivers are better supported in caring for their senior loved ones. For example, we are expanding our eldercare services in the community to support working caregivers. We have also made respite services more accessible so that caregivers can rest and recharge.

25. There are some women who may have chosen to take a break from work to focus on their families, but would like to return to the workforce after some time. We have in place programmes to facilitate their return to work. For example, since our last CEDAW review session, we have introduced SkillsFuture¹⁰ movement in 2015, which allows Singaporeans, including non-working women, to tap on the movement and subsidies¹¹ for training to upgrade their skills. In addition, the upcoming Returner Work Trial programme will encourage companies to offer more job-sharing opportunities for those who are not ready to return to full-time employment.

Facilitating Women to Leadership Positions

Madam Chair,

26. Today, women in Singapore are well-educated and contribute actively to the economy. We must provide them with the same opportunities as men, to be in leadership positions.

27. It is with much pride that I take the opportunity today to share with the Committee that on 14 September this year, Singapore witnessed a significant

⁹ This includes flexi-time, flexi-place and flexi-load arrangements.

¹⁰ SkillsFuture is a national movement that (a) helps individuals make well-informed choices in their education, training and career; (b) develops an integrated, high-quality system of education and training that responds to constantly-evolving industry needs; (c) promotes employer recognition and career development based on skills and mastery; and (d) fosters a culture that supports and celebrates lifelong learning.

moment in our history - the inauguration of our first female President of the Republic of Singapore, Madam Halimah Yacob. The highest office in the land, the President is the symbol of the nation. Some of you may have met her at Singapore's last oral presentation in 2011, where she was the head of delegation, presenting the fourth periodic report before this Committee.

28. As Madam President once said, "... people should look at not the gender, but the person and see what the person can contribute." Indeed, she has contributed to Singapore in various capacities – be it as a labour leader, a parliamentarian, Minister of State, and Speaker of Parliament. In all these roles, she has advocated for the rights of workers, fought for opportunities for single mothers and children of poor families, as well as healthcare for the disabled and elderly. Madam Halimah was a consistent and fearless voice in the union, the Parliament and the Government, pushing us all to build a more equitable society. As the country's first woman President now, Madam Halimah continues to be an inspiration to many women in Singapore.

29. In Singapore, women can enter politics based on their own merits. Currently, women occupy 23 out of 100 seats, which is 23.0%, in the Singapore Parliament. This is comparable to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's world average of 23.3%¹². Back in 2001, we only had 12 women parliamentarians. Today, the number has almost doubled to 23.

Madam Chair,

30. Having women in corporate leadership makes good business sense. Women bring their diverse skill-sets, experiences and perspectives to the boardroom. However, due to various factors, women continue to be under-represented on the corporate boards in Singapore.

31. Since our last CEDAW review session, the Diversity Action Committee was set up in 2014 to address this issue. It comprises illustrious leaders from the people, private and public sectors. As of June 2017, women's representation on boards of companies listed on the Singapore Exchange was 10.3%, up from 8.3% in 2013. The top 100 companies are leading the way with women forming 12.2% of their boards. To accelerate change, the Committee recommended to the Monetary Authority of Singapore to enhance its Code of Corporate Governance and require listed companies to disclose their board diversity policy, measurable objectives, and their progress towards achieving these objectives. The Monetary Authority has since formed a Corporate Governance Council to review the Code. In April this year, the Diversity Action Committee announced a triple-tier target of 20% by 2020, 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030, for women's representation on boards of listed companies. It also called upon larger companies to take the lead and be a catalyst for change. Singapore will continue to encourage more women to achieve greater heights.

¹¹ This includes the SkillsFutureCredit and the SkillsFuture Mid-career Enhanced Subsidy for Singaporeans aged 40 or older.

¹² Both houses combined as at 1 May 2017.

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND EMPOWERING VULNERABLE GROUPS OF WOMEN

Madam Chair,

32. Some groups of women within our society may require more support. We need to help them to overcome barriers so that they too can also realise their potential. Let me share some of the recent progress and developments.

Elderly Women

33. One such group is our elderly women. Like most countries, women in Singapore have a longer life expectancy compared to men¹³. Many tend to leave the workforce for caregiving or family responsibilities. Hence they may not have sufficient savings to see them through old age.

34. I have earlier explained some of our efforts to encourage women to remain in the workforce longer or return to work. We have also implemented various initiatives to supplement their retirement income, since our last CEDAW review session. For example, the Central Provident Fund, or CPF in short, is the foundation of Singapore's social security framework which helps our citizens to build up their retirement adequacy. We have implemented measures to encourage spousal transfers. The result has been encouraging. The gap in average CPF balances between women and men has narrowed from 16% in 2006 to 11% in 2016. This is a reassuring sign that women can better meet their retirement needs, possibly due to them holding better-paying jobs, staying in the workforce longer and the changes to the CPF rules.

35. In 2016, the Government also introduced Silver Support, an income supplement for seniors, which helps lifetime poor seniors including female caregivers who did not work and save through CPF.

36. At the same time, we need to ensure that the needs of our elderly women are taken care of, as they get older. To support their aspirations to age comfortably at home and in the community, we are injecting eldercare services in public housing estates around Singapore. Since our last CEDAW review session, we have doubled our home care and day care capacity from 2011 to 2016¹⁴ and are on target to grow this to 10,000 home care places and 6,200 day care places by 2020. We have also enhanced transportation to care services and will continue to build up a diverse range of home and centre-based care options to meet the evolving needs of seniors and enable them to be supported in the community for as long as possible.

¹³ The life expectancy at birth for females is 84.9 years, compared to 80.4 years for men in 2015.

¹⁴ We have expanded our home care capacity from 3,800 places in 2011 to around 7,500 home care places in 2016. We have also increased our day care places from 2,100 in 2011 to 4,000 in 2016.

Single Mothers

37. Next, we recognise the challenges that many single mothers and their children face. We adopt a child-centric perspective when designing policies. Hence, children of single parents also receive the same health and education benefits as any other citizen child. In addition, we have made some policy changes and implemented some programmes since our last CEDAW review session, to better support single mothers. Last year, we extended the full duration of maternity leave to unwed mothers, and their children are also now eligible for a Child Development Account – same as their married counterparts and children. We have also initiated community programmes, such as KidSTART¹⁵ and SPIN¹⁶ to better support vulnerable families, including single parent families.

Victims of abuse/violence/harassment

Madam Chair,

38. My Government is firmly committed to eradicating violence against women, so that our women feel safe and protected, and free to pursue their aspirations.

39. We have a robust legislative framework. For example, the Women's Charter, Penal Code and Protection from Harassment Act protect women from violence and harassment. Last year, we have amended the Women's Charter to enhance protection for victims of family violence and professionals engaged in protection work. Our National Family Violence Networking System provides multiple access points, for victims to obtain help. In addition, since our last CEDAW review session, my Ministry launched the "Break the Silence | Against Family Violence" Campaign last year to renew and raise awareness of family violence.

Victims of trafficking

40. In the same vein, my Government also does not tolerate and is fully committed to combat human trafficking. Our size, strict border control measures, tough laws and a well-documented workforce have continued to limit the opportunities for human trafficking syndicates from carrying out their activities. In 2010, an Inter-Agency Taskforce was formed to strengthen whole-of-government coordination on issues relating to trafficking-in-persons, or TIP in short. Since our last CEDAW review session, a National Plan of Action was launched in March 2012 to strengthen Singapore's capability to combat TIP. This was completed in 2015. In

¹⁵ The KidSTART pilot project proactively identifies low-income and vulnerable children, provide them with early access to health, learning and developmental support, and monitor their progress during their early years.

¹⁶ The community pilot project SPIN [Single Parents: INformed, INvolved, INcluded] aims to strengthen informal support network of vulnerable single parents and increase access to community resources.

March 2016, the National Approach against TIP was launched to build on the success of the National Plan of Action.

41. In addition, a dedicated legislation, the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, came into force in 2015. We acceded to the UN TIP Protocol in the same year. In 2016, we ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, and was one of the first ASEAN Member States to do so.

Foreign Domestic Workers

42. We have also strengthened support for our foreign domestic workers, who are mostly women. We recognise that it is not easy coming to a foreign land to work and earn a living. Thus, these migrant workers are entitled to protection.

43. All foreign domestic workers are well-protected under the Penal Code and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. In view of their more vulnerable status, the Penal Code allows for enhanced penalties on abusers of domestic workers of up to 1.5 times the maximum penalty. Employers who are convicted will also be permanently banned from hiring another foreign domestic worker. In 2012, the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act was also enhanced to impose harsher penalties on employers who flout the law. In addition, we also regularly review our legislation to ensure the safety and protection of our workers in Singapore's highly-urbanised environment¹⁷.

Foreign Spouses

44. We recognise the needs of foreign spouses and their families. The foreign spouse of a Singapore citizen may be granted Permanent Residence in Singapore. Each application is evaluated on a range of criteria, which include an assessment of the ability of the Singaporean Citizen sponsor to support the family, the length of marriage and whether the couple have any children from the marriage. Foreign spouses who do not qualify for Permanent Residence yet may be granted a Long-Term Visit Pass, or LTVP in short, for them to remain in Singapore with their families. Those who are granted LTVP are allowed to seek employment to help support their families. The LTVP is generally valid for one year.

45. Since our last CEDAW review session, we have implemented various initiatives to render them greater support. For example, in 2012, we introduced the enhanced LTVP Plus scheme. This is valid for a longer period, and holders of this pass receive health benefits that are on par with Permanent Residents. In addition, we introduced a Pre-Marriage LTVP Assessment in 2015 to provide Singaporeans and their foreign partners with greater clarity, prior to marriage, on the foreign

¹⁷ For example, employers are prohibited from asking their workers to clean window exteriors above ground level, unless she is supervised and window grilles are installed and locked during the cleaning process. Personal Accident Insurance was also enhanced in 2017 to provide insurance coverage of \$60,000 from \$40,000.

partner's eligibility for an LTVP based on the circumstances of the couple at the time of application. Furthermore, we introduced the Marriage Preparation Programme and the Marriage Support Programme to help couples better manage cross-cultural issues in their marriage and help the foreign spouse settle down in Singapore.

CONCLUSION

Madam Chair,

46. I have described the progress my Government has achieved in supporting the women in my country to fulfil their aspirations. Women in Singapore have made great strides in various fields. Singapore recognises that enhancing the status of women is a continuous process and remains committed to this effort. We will continue to review and address the gaps in our society.

47. A total of 20 parliamentarians participated in a robust debate on the parliamentary motion on 'Aspirations of Singapore Women' in April this year. It examined the aspirations of Singapore women in four broad areas - leadership and social impact, employment and entrepreneurship, family and caregiving, as well as financial well-being. Parliamentarians engaged in a constructive dialogue on the concrete steps that the Singapore Government can take in these various areas to help women achieve their aspirations. I was very encouraged by the extensive discussions and look forward to more measures to help women in Singapore progress and achieve their dreams.

48. Let me conclude by reiterating that Singapore remains committed to CEDAW. As I've mentioned at the start of my remarks, our progress would not be possible without the concerted effort between the public, private and people sectors. We will continue to work with our local NGOs, such as our women groups' representatives here with us today. Singapore adopts a practical approach to the realisation of human rights. Singapore enables the fulfilment of these rights effectively, bearing in mind our national circumstances and aspirations. It is in this context that we have given serious consideration to the Committee's previous concluding observations and have implemented them in the best possible way.

49. My delegation and I look forward to a meaningful and fruitful dialogue with you. Thank you.

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**CLOSING STATEMENT BY A/PROF MUHAMMAD FAISHAL IBRAHIM, SENIOR
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY
DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

Wednesday, 25 October 2017, 1700 HRS, UN Headquarters, Geneva

Madam Chair,
Distinguished members of the CEDAW Committee,

On behalf of the delegation, I would like to thank the Committee for the invaluable insights which were shared with us today. It has indeed been a fruitful session.

2. I also hope my delegation and I have given you a better appreciation of Singapore's unique circumstances and challenges and how we are working to overcome them.

3. We are fully aware that our principles of governance, the way we care for our citizens, realise human rights and preserve our social harmony, may also not fully conform with how other societies have organised themselves.

4. But we believe that every country should be given the time and space to deal with its own development, and advance women's rights and human rights in its own way, taking into account their unique and evolving social and cultural context.
Madam Chair

5. We are proud of our collective efforts to advance women's rights so far. We are currently 5th on the UN Human Development Index and 11th on the Gender Inequality Index. We have also outlined the many legislative measures, policies and programmes we have implemented since our last CEDAW review session in 2011.

6. But we acknowledge with humility that there is always room for improvement. Singapore will continue to support and participate constructively in the CEDAW process.

7. We will continue to work with all stakeholders, including civil society, and constantly review our policies and programmes which impact women. The Singapore Government remains fully committed to further advancing the status of our women.

8. I would like to assure the Committee that we will take your views and comments into serious consideration in our efforts to ensure the full and practical implementation of our CEDAW obligations. Thank you, once again, for the very constructive dialogue. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Secretariat and translators for having worked so hard for this session.

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