



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1534th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Wednesday, 25 October 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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

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

Fifth periodic report of Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/5; CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/5 and CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/5/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Singapore took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore), introducing the fifth periodic report of Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/5), said that his Government was fully committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights of all its citizens, including women, with due regard for the country's national circumstances and aspirations. In the latest United Nations Gender Inequality Index, Singapore had been ranked eleventh best out of 159 countries; its indicators for women in terms of life expectancy, literacy, university education and employment were all very high.
3. Singapore took a coordinated "whole-of-government" approach to advancing women's status and well-being. Accordingly, gender equality was the responsibility not of a single government department, but of the Inter-Ministry Committee set up to monitor the implementation of the Convention. Cross-cutting issues could be dealt with better in that way, in part with the support of the Office for Women's Development in the Ministry of Social and Family Development, which was also the national focal point for women's affairs. Civil society organizations also engaged actively with the Inter-Ministry Committee.
4. The elimination of barriers for women in the workplace, the community and the home required changes in mindsets, attitudes and expectations. Progress was being made: women now made up nearly one third of research scientists and engineers, the recruitment of women to the Armed Forces had doubled since 2010 and women accounted for between 46 per cent and 64 per cent of judicial officers in the courts, including the Supreme Court.
5. It took time to change mindsets and community involvement and acceptance were critical. Even so, notable progress had been made in the administration of Muslim law, for example. Singapore maintained its reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention in order to protect certain religious rights and permit the operation of Muslim law, but the Muslim community had over the years adopted more progressive practices in the area of gender equality. The practice of Muslim law had come into greater alignment with civil law, thanks in part to the work of the Fatwa Committee of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, which met regularly to review religious practices and ensure that they were progressive and suited to a multi-faith community. Recently, for example, two edicts had been issued providing Muslim women and their dependants with more options in inheritance matters and the Administration of Muslim Law Act had been amended to enable a widow to administer her late husband's property.
6. There also needed to be a cultural shift in attitudes to household and caring responsibilities, and to that end men were being encouraged to take a more active role in the home. Active fathering and shared parental responsibility were being encouraged through projects run by the Centre for Fathering and by the introduction of paid paternity leave, including the possibility for a working father to share his wife's maternity leave, subject to her agreement. As a result, perceptions were slowly changing: in the 2016 marriage and parenthood survey, 99 per cent of married respondents had agreed that both parents were equally important as caregivers for children and 95 per cent had agreed that the two should share the responsibilities in the home equally.
7. Both men and women needed more options in order to pursue their goals, whether career or family or both. In addition to the initiatives introduced since Singapore had last reported to the Committee, aimed at encouraging companies to offer flexible working arrangements to their employees and setting standards in that regard, his Government was building capacity to support women and men in meeting their responsibilities for care. As well as the vast increase in the number of childcare places, efforts were being stepped up to support those caring for older family members, notably by expanding services for older

persons in the community and making respite services more accessible to caregivers. In addition, programmes such as the SkillsFuture movement and the forthcoming Returner Work trial programme, were designed to facilitate women's return to work after a break to focus on families.

8. Women needed the same leadership opportunities as men, and Singapore had recently witnessed a historic development in that regard with the inauguration of its first female President. Women now occupied 23 of the 100 seats in Parliament, which was double the number in 2001 and compared well with the Inter-Parliamentary Union worldwide average of 23.3 per cent.

9. Women were nevertheless still underrepresented on corporate boards and the Diversity Action Committee set up in 2014 to address that issue had recently announced a triple target of 20 per cent women on the boards of listed companies by 2020, 25 per cent by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030.

10. Some groups of women required help to overcome barriers and realize their potential. One such group was older women, who tended to outlive their husbands yet might not have accumulated sufficient savings to see them through old age because they had left the workforce for caregiving or family responsibilities. As a result of initiatives to encourage women to remain in the workforce longer, and to supplement women's prospective retirement income, for example through spousal transfers to the Central Provident Fund, the basis of the social security system, the gap in men's and women's holdings in the Fund had narrowed from 16 per cent in 2006 to 11 per cent in 2016. In addition, home-care and day-care capacity for older persons had doubled in the past five years and would continue to grow, while other services, such as transport to care facilities, were being enhanced to meet the evolving needs of such persons.

11. Policy changes had been made and programmes put in place to support another vulnerable group, namely single mothers. The children of single parents received the same health and education benefits as all other children, and were now eligible for a child development account. Community programmes such as KidSTART and Single Parents: INformed, INVolved, INcluded (SPIN) provided additional support for vulnerable families, including single-parent families.

12. A robust legislative framework was in place to protect women from violence and harassment, including the Protection from Harassment Act and the Penal Code. The Women's Charter had recently been amended to provide better protection for victims of family violence and professionals engaged in protection work. Similarly, his Government did not tolerate human trafficking: the Inter-Agency Task Force set up in 2010 coordinated government action on trafficking and the National Approach against Trafficking in Persons had been launched in 2016 to build on the success of the 2012-2015 National Plan of Action. The Prevention of Human Trafficking Act had come into force in 2015 and Singapore had ratified the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in 2016.

13. Foreign domestic workers were protected under the Penal Code and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act; owing to the greater vulnerability of such workers, employers convicted of offences against them faced aggravated penalties of up to one and a half times the maximum sentence and a permanent ban on hiring foreign domestic workers. Various initiatives had been launched to provide greater support to foreign spouses of Singaporean citizens, including an enhanced Long-Term Visit Pass, which entitled holders to health benefits on a par with those available to permanent residents. Schemes had also been introduced to help couples, before they married, assess the foreign partner's eligibility for the long-term visit pass, or to help married couples deal with cross-cultural issues.

14. In April 2017, 20 members of Parliament had taken part in a debate on the aspirations of Singaporean women, looking at the areas of leadership and social impact, employment and entrepreneurship, family and caregiving and financial well-being. A constructive dialogue had taken place on the measures that the Government could take to help women achieve their aspirations.

Articles 1 to 6

15. **Ms. Hayashi** said that there were still obstacles preventing the State party from fully implementing its obligations under the Convention. Direct and indirect discrimination against women was not defined in law. The Constitution did not explicitly mention sex and gender as prohibited grounds of discrimination; indeed, according to article 12 (2) of the Constitution, the provisions on discrimination did not apply in the area of family law, yet it was in that area that numerous discriminatory laws existed. She would like to hear about the State party's road map and timetable for the adoption of legislation addressing both direct and indirect discrimination against women on all grounds.

16. In the Committee's view, the State party's reservations to articles 2 and 16 were incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention within the meaning of article 28 (2) of the Convention. The State party justified its reservations on the grounds that they were necessary in order to protect minorities. However, many Muslim countries had no such reservations. She would be grateful if the delegation could let the Committee have concrete plans for withdrawing the remaining reservations, with a clear time frame.

17. **Ms. Manalo** said that the Convention defined discrimination against women and called on States parties to incorporate the principle of equality into national legislation. The entire focus of the Convention was on facilitating de jure and de facto equality between women and men. The delegation's introductory statement had described a number of areas where equality was materializing in the State party, so she wondered why, if it could be done in practice, it could not be enshrined in law.

18. According to the State party's report, the principle of equality of all persons was enshrined in article 12 of the Constitution, which, the report said, encompassed discrimination against women. In that context she would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the ruling handed down by the Supreme Court in 2014 to the effect that the Constitution prohibited discrimination only on the grounds defined explicitly in article 12, namely religion, race, descent and place of birth. The Supreme Court had found that article 12 (1) of the Constitution was merely "declaratory and aspirational in nature" and that article 12 (2) did not prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex or gender. Yet there were particular laws addressing problems of discrimination against women and she wondered why such discrimination could not then be incorporated into a general, overarching provision of the Constitution.

19. In its previous concluding observations, the Committee had asked the State party to fully incorporate the applicable parts of articles 2 and 16 and to withdraw its remaining reservations within a concrete time frame. The State party argued that women had strong legal protection despite the absence of specific gender equality legislation. If that was the case, the reservations should be unnecessary. She strongly recommended that the State party withdraw them.

20. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that the Committee had drawn attention to the absence of a specific constitutional definition of discrimination against women on a number of previous occasions and the Government had given the issue much consideration. In 2014, however, the Supreme Court had ruled that article 12 (1) of the Constitution, which read: "All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law", applied to all persons, regardless of their gender. That meant that women could apply to the courts for a review of any legislation or provision that allegedly discriminated against them on the basis of gender. Thus, for example, the Court had posited that a law on banning women from driving could be deemed incompatible with the principle of equal treatment enshrined in article 12 (1). For that reason, in the Court's view, it would be illogical to classify women as a distinct category.

21. **Mr. Bin Mohd Nasir** (Singapore) said that there was no specific timeline for the withdrawal of the country's reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention. While the Government was committed to the progressive development of Muslim law and practices, it was a continuous journey. Any changes in the practice of Muslim law had to resonate with the community, be meaningful to their religious life and gain wide acceptance. Progress was however being made. For example, following meetings between the Government and various stakeholders, including Muslim lawyers and financial practitioners, the

Administration of Muslim Law Act had been amended, bringing it into closer alignment with article 16 (1) (h) of the Convention. Further evaluation of issues such as inheritance was envisaged and comparative studies of developments in other Muslim countries were being undertaken, while taking account of the specificities of Muslim practice in Singapore. To that end, a dedicated office had been set up, under the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, to study gender-related developments and practices.

22. **Ms. Hayashi**, while noting the delegation's explanation of article 12 (1) of the Constitution, said that article 12 (3) seemed to exclude provisions relating to personal laws, which would appear to restrict the legislation under which a judicial review could be sought. In that connection, she would be interested to hear about any cases in which women had successfully challenged discriminatory legislation.

23. She would welcome information on measures to enhance women's access to justice, in particular women victims of gender-based violence, and to provide mandatory training for judges and law enforcement officers to improve their understanding of gender-based discrimination. Lastly, she asked whether the Government intended to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

24. **Ms. Manalo** said that she would be interested to know why it had taken so long for Singapore to have its first woman president. It was important to ensure that all women had the opportunity to reach the upper echelons of power.

25. **Ms. Schulz** said that, while she appreciated the explanation given as to article 12 of the Constitution, it was her understanding that certain minority groups, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, did not enjoy protection under that same article. If that was the case, how were the rights of women belonging to sexual minorities protected?

26. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that, at just 52 years old, Singapore was a young nation and it was a source of considerable pride that a woman was president. Moreover, her story as a career politician not only served as an example to other women but also demonstrated that the system enabled anyone, regardless of their race, language, religion or gender, to get ahead in life. It fell to the Government, however, to create the environment necessary for women to flourish.

27. After due consideration, the Government had decided against ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the time being. A number of legal and non-legal mechanisms were already in place to enable individuals to file complaints of discrimination.

28. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that article 12 (3) of the Constitution should be interpreted within the broader context of article 152, which sought to recognize the special status of the Malay people, who were indigenous to Singapore. Regarding the Supreme Court's decision, it was clear that article 12 (1) of the Constitution applied to everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

29. A judicial college had recently been established in Singapore to coordinate the training of all legal officials, judges and magistrates. Training included gender-sensitive components, as well as courses on subjects related to the Convention, such as how to deal with cases involving domestic violence.

30. **Ms. Manalo**, referring to the fact that the current Prime Minister was the son of a former prime minister, said that there were concerns that a political dynasty was emerging in Singapore. The highest positions in government should be open to all talented Singaporeans, no matter what their background or family connections.

31. She noted that, despite the Committee's recommendations in its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/4, para. 36), the State party had yet to establish an independent national human rights institution, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), whose competencies would include issues related to equality between women and men.

32. **Ms. Schulz** said that the information provided by the delegation seemed to suggest that LGBTI persons were protected by article 12 of the Constitution. By contrast, reports

indicated that, in a case challenging the constitutionality of article 377A of the Penal Code, which criminalized sexual relations between homosexual men, the courts had ruled that the principle of non-discrimination contained in article 12 (2) of the Constitution did not apply to sexual minorities. She would appreciate further clarification of the legal situation.

33. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that gender equality in Singapore was based on the principle of meritocracy. As far as positions in government were concerned, the best person for the job was selected, irrespective of that person's socioeconomic background.

34. The establishment of a separate national human rights institution was not deemed necessary at the current time, since the same objectives could already be achieved through different entities already in existence. Singapore had a decentralized but mutually reinforcing system of legislation, regulation and institutional oversight to protect human rights without the need for an additional layer of supervision. The Interministerial Committee on Human Rights, which comprised representatives of 15 government ministries and engaged with civil society, coordinated cross-cutting policies on human rights. Moreover, there were multiple platforms through which Singaporeans could air their grievances.

35. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that, in the view of the Supreme Court, article 12 (2) of the Constitution was not the relevant basis on which to test the constitutionality of article 377A of the Penal Code. It had been tested instead against article 12 (1) and its constitutionality upheld.

36. **Ms. Verges** said that she wished to know what measures were envisaged by the Government to strengthen its implementation of the Convention, with particular reference to the Committee's previous recommendation regarding the status, mandate and resources of the State party's national machinery for the advancement of women (CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/4, para. 18). With regard to the Inter-Ministry Committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention, she would welcome information on its composition and its mandate, since, in general, interministerial committees tended to be supervisory, rather than implementing, bodies.

37. She asked the delegation to elaborate on the information in paragraph 2.11 of the State party's report regarding the national machinery's human and financial resources. In particular, she wondered how its budget compared with that of other government departments. Lastly, in the absence of an independent national human rights institution, she asked how effective the Interministerial Committee on Human Rights had been.

38. **Ms. Manalo** said that, in its report, the State party had failed to recognize the need for temporary special measures, despite the fact that there were many fields in which women were underrepresented, such as science and engineering. In politics, while the number of women parliamentarians had increased almost 50 per cent, from 12 in 2001 to 23 at the current time, the rate of progress seemed slow. She wished to know what measures were being taken and mechanisms put in place to promote a gender balance by encouraging more women into political and public life and enabling them to advance their careers.

39. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that the Inter-Ministry Committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention was composed of various stakeholders, including women parliamentarians, and was not merely a supervisory body. In fact, it was a way of ensuring that each ministry incorporated the gender dimension into its area of competence.

40. There was no specific gender budget, since a cross-cutting approach to budgeting was taken. As a result, specific figures could not be provided. Government spending had, however, gone up in that regard. For example, the Government had introduced the Pioneer Generation Package, which aimed to support the older generation in their retirement; older women, in particular, would benefit from it greatly.

41. **Ms. Lee** (Singapore) said that the Government's approach to gender equality was based on the principle of meritocracy and equal opportunities for men and women. Even without the use of temporary special measures, women had made rapid and significant progress on their own merit and without any special consideration. Women were able to

participate fully in all areas of life. For example, the proportion of women in science and engineering had increased from 26.5 per cent in 2009 to 29 per cent in 2014, while the number of women recruits to the Armed Forces had doubled. As mindsets changed and women became more educated, more women would enter politics. While the necessary changes would take time, Singapore was committed to achieving gender equality in the long term.

42. **Ms. Manalo** said that, since the Convention was concerned with gender equality, any data provided should shed light on women's situation, status and opportunities in comparison with that of men. It was a matter of concern, for example, that, of the 19 government ministers, only 1 was a woman. The principle of meritocracy still required a gender balance. What the Committee therefore wanted to know was what specific measures, opportunities or incentives were being put in place to facilitate women's advancement and achieve gender equality.

43. **Ms. Acar** said that she wondered whether the meaning and scope of temporary special measures had been fully understood. Temporary special measures were intended to accelerate de facto gender equality, in particular in all areas — not just in politics — in which women were underrepresented, disadvantaged or faced discrimination. The purpose of the Convention was not only equality of opportunity but also substantive equality.

44. **Ms. Verges** said that, given the Committee's experience, she hoped that the State party would heed the Committee's concerns regarding the national human rights institution. In that connection, she wondered whether the members of the Interministerial Committee on Human Rights were suitably trained and had the appropriate background to deal with the issues that would arise.

45. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that members of the Interministerial Committee should indeed have the necessary qualifications.

46. **Ms. Lee** (Singapore) said that, since the review of her country's previous periodic report, the Diversity Action Committee had been established to boost the representation of women on the boards of large companies. The Committee had recommended that the Monetary Authority of Singapore strengthen the Code of Corporate Governance and require listed companies to disclose their diversity policies for the board of directors and key management. The Authority had since formed the Corporate Governance Council to review the Code. The Government was working to raise awareness of the importance of gender balance in corporate leadership and in civil society at large.

47. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that, though his Government did not share the Committee's views on temporary special measures, it did share the aspiration of seeing more women in positions of authority. It would do its best to provide an environment that enabled women to grow and would not hesitate to take any needed steps in that regard.

48. **Ms. Manalo** said that the Committee still had not heard what temporary special measures the State party was taking to accelerate gender equality.

49. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that Singapore did not have such measures because his Government believed in the principles of meritocracy.

50. **Ms. Manalo** said that, while meritocracy was good, it should not impede women's advancement.

51. **Ms. Acar** said that the State party was to be commended for its efforts to raise awareness of gender inequalities and stereotypes and bring about equality. Nevertheless, society's view of gender roles in the nuclear family appeared to rely on the stereotypes of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. The State still used the "head of household" concept, which, given that three quarters of heads of household were men, contributed to maintaining a gender-based hierarchy.

52. She asked what was being done to provide State-sponsored care facilities for older persons. That would free up younger women to work and thereby provide for their own retirement, thus breaking a vicious cycle.

53. The delegation's opening statement had indicated, in connection with reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention, that the State placed the rights of minority groups such as Muslims ahead of the rights of individual women. That was the wrong approach; and, indeed, the rights and freedoms of women in the State party's Muslim community were restricted: for example, they could not marry without a male guardian's consent. Such provisions had been amended or abolished in several countries with Muslim majority populations and she welcomed the Government's stated intention to open a dialogue about such matters with the local Muslim community.

54. Domestic and sexual violence remained underreported in Singapore, largely because the family unit and female modesty were given precedence over women's rights. She asked what was being done to encourage and facilitate reporting of such violence, what services were available for reporting of incidents, and for victims in general, how many shelters there were for victims and whether there was a round-the-clock dedicated helpline for reporting violence against women.

55. The practice of administering polygraph tests to victims of sexual violence was not in keeping with the stance that women's testimony in such matters should be trusted and acted on. Furthermore, national law did not include a definition of consent. Did the State party intend to incorporate such a definition into the relevant legislation? The lack of penalties for marital rape was yet more evidence of the family unit's being valued more than individual women's rights. The delegation was invited to explain why emotional abuse and financial violence were not recognized as forms of gender-based violence.

56. She gathered that few complaints were brought under the Protection from Harassment Act because the procedure for doing so was complex and expensive. The delegation was requested to provide clarification. While the Women's Charter provided for protection orders, the requirements to be met before a request could be accepted were reportedly unreasonable. She would welcome clarification of that issue, also.

57. **Ms. Rana**, commending the State party for its efforts to combat human trafficking, said that the Committee was nevertheless concerned about the continuing prevalence of trafficking in women and girls in the country, the alleged criminalization and deportation of trafficked women and girls as immigration offenders, and the low reporting rate. The Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, which focused on domestic sex workers, needed to recognize that foreign workers, too, could be trafficked. Foreign victims needed access to medical treatment, social support, legal aid and other support measures. Also, there was no law regulating the foreign bride trade, which sometimes involved trafficking. She asked whether the State party planned to bring the Act into line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Trafficking in Persons Protocol), to which it had recently acceded.

58. In paragraph 26 of its replies to the list of issues, the State party described the desired outcome of its National Approach on Trafficking in Persons as "an appropriate victim care and support framework that looks after the needs of all victims of trafficking". She asked whether the State party intended to implement a comprehensive victim-centred approach, with speedier investigation of cases and enhanced care and protection, including dedicated shelters, for trafficking victims.

59. According to paragraph 22 of the replies, very few cases of trafficking had been prosecuted to date. As the practice was reportedly widespread, the delegation was invited to explain what measures were in place to identify cases of trafficking and ensure that they were investigated and prosecuted. If there were no such measures, she wondered whether the State party would consider developing them.

60. The training provided to those dealing with trafficking victims was apparently not adequate, and she wished to know more about the Government's plan for enhanced training of its officials to identify victims. Information on the indicators used to measure the effectiveness of the training provided would also be welcome.

61. While the State party's collaboration with ASEAN to tackle human trafficking at the regional level was welcome, the Committee would like to know how the Government

worked with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to address trafficking of women and girls at the national level. In particular, she wished to know how much funding for that purpose was allocated to NGOs.

62. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that gender stereotypes were tackled from the early years of a child's schooling. All students studied the same core subjects in school and it was made clear that girls and boys had equal access to education, health and other opportunities. For adults, there were awareness-raising programmes about issues such as late marriage. A programme targeted at the Indian community featured successful women. The point about expanding the definition of a head of household would be considered in the course of preparations for the next census.

63. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that his Government took violence against women very seriously. Victims were encouraged to report incidents to the police. The idea of a dedicated helpline had been vetoed because calling the general emergency number 999 was the fastest way to reach the police.

64. His Government would not review the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act just yet, as the Act was new and Singapore had only recently acceded to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Police and immigration officials and judicial workers were trained to handle trafficking cases, and police officers from other ASEAN countries were sometimes invited to participate in such training. Victims were offered medical care, counselling and temporary accommodation.

65. Polygraphs were used in connection with many offences, not just sexual violence. They were not compulsory for victims and required written consent. Forensic medical exams of victims of sex crimes could be conducted at police stations, by doctors brought in for that purpose, so that victims were not obliged to visit a hospital. His Government considered violence against women wrong in all situations, including in marriage, and was reviewing the issue of impunity for marital rape.

66. As for allegations that a third of victims were abused by police, such behaviour by police was not condoned in Singapore. Victims were encouraged to report incidents, which were investigated internally. An independent review panel made up of retired judges and lawyers ensured that investigations were carried out thoroughly and fairly. When allegations were found to have merit, the necessary action was taken.

67. **Mr. Bin Mohd Nasir** (Singapore) said that the Government was in the process of identifying and reviewing Islamic practices that might perpetuate negative stereotypes of Muslim women. Religious teachers voluntarily underwent continuous training upon applying for their licence. Seminars and workshops where they learned about the Convention and gender-based discrimination and discussed changing ideas in Islamic thought about the role of men and women had been well-received. Islamic services, which were broadcast by local radio stations, provided an opportunity to promote the idea of men and women having equal rights and responsibilities. The Government also encouraged social media to bring public education campaigns on gender equality to a wider audience.

68. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore) said that the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act covered human trafficking for the purposes of both sexual and labour exploitation. A total of 68 cases had been investigated since the entry into force of the Act in March 2015. Cases that were not directly related to human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation could be investigated under other laws, such as the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act and the Employment Act.

69. The Government ensured that caregivers had adequate means to support themselves in old age through various initiatives, such as the 2014 Pioneer Generation Package and the Silver Support Scheme. The availability of home-help services made it possible for female caregivers to engage in part-time paid employment. There were various schemes in place to provide women wishing to rejoin the workforce with the necessary support and guidance, including career counselling services. Employers were also encouraged to offer female caregivers flexible working arrangements. Moreover, the Government had lowered the minimum amount of savings that members of the Central Provident Fund had to accumulate

before they could transfer a portion of them to their spouse as a means of supplementing his or her retirement income.

70. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that the Government ran the country's shelters with the help of volunteer welfare organizations. Those shelters were exclusively for women and took in victims of both domestic violence and human trafficking. Volunteers were trained to provide counselling and support to the women residing in the shelters.

71. **Ms. Rana** said that, while she understood that the State party had no plans to assess the impact of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act on account of its having entered into force only a few years previously, it still needed to develop a reliable set of monitoring indicators to enable it conduct an impact assessment in the future. The training dispensed to date on how to prevent, detect and assist the victims of human trafficking was clearly inadequate and in need of improvement. The State party should take due account of the specific nature of the crime of human trafficking and establish separate shelters for victims. She welcomed the State party's cooperation with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and would like to hear about any efforts that it had undertaken to create effective participatory mechanisms to promote the engagement of and cooperation among diverse State stakeholders. It would also be useful to learn more about the volunteer welfare organizations that helped to run the country's shelters. She asked how the State party planned to build the capacity of women's organizations and civil society to enable them to play a leading role in implementing anti-trafficking strategies and in assisting and supporting trafficking victims.

72. **Ms. Acar** said that the concept of head of household had become obsolete, as household responsibilities should be divided equally between the spouses. To imply the existence of a gender hierarchy in the home only served to reinforce gender stereotypes. It was her understanding that the 999 police hotline was used to report all kinds of emergencies and not only cases of gender-based violence. She asked whether the staff manning the hotline received training on how to handle complaints of gender-based violence and where alleged victims of gender-based violence were directed for assistance. Could the police issue emergency protection orders that would force a violent spouse or partner to leave the family home? The State party should set up separate shelters for women who were victims of gender-based violence and provide the staff running them with adequate training. Lastly, she asked why, under Singaporean law, a spouse could file for divorce only after three years of marriage and whether the State party intended to relax that requirement.

73. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be useful to know whether there was a law regulating the trade in foreign brides in Singapore. The State party should bear in mind that gender-based discrimination against Muslim women could not be justified in law or in practice under the pretext of safeguarding religion or minority rights. It should also consider undertaking, within a definite time frame, a comprehensive reform of the Administration of Muslim Law Act so that marriage was recognized as a partnership of equals. Public consultations should also be conducted with a view to bridging the gap between the Act and the reality of Muslim women in Singapore.

74. It was her understanding that prostitution was legal in Singapore and that sex workers were required to obtain a licence in order to operate. While the Convention did not prohibit prostitution per se, it did prohibit sexual exploitation. The State party should consider revising its current policy to afford female sex workers adequate protection against sexual exploitation and to guarantee their rights.

75. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that victims of gender-based or domestic violence could use either the 999 police hotline or another dedicated hotline to report the offence. The staff manning those hotlines received specialized training.

76. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that the Government would give due consideration to the suggestions made on setting up separate shelters for female trafficking victims. Within the Criminal Investigation Department of the Singapore Police Force there was a specialized unit for human trafficking offences responsible for investigating any complaints directed to it. The Singapore Police Force worked in partnership with a number of NGOs, including the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), which ran a sexual assault

care centre and reported to it on the victims' behalf. AWARE was in the process of producing training material on dealing with victims of sexual crime for police officers. The specialized unit for human trafficking offences worked closely with the NGO Project X to assist victims of sex trafficking. Project X played an important role in bringing alleged cases of human trafficking to the unit's attention.

77. **Mr. Bin Mohd Nasir** (Singapore) said that the Government would give due consideration to the suggestions made on reforming the Administration of Muslim Law Act, particularly with regard to marriage, and would continue to hold consultations with Muslim women's organizations in order to gain a clearer understanding of the realities facing Muslim women in Singapore. There were, however, currently no plans to reform the Act.

78. **Ms. Lee** (Singapore) said that, under the Women's Charter, a woman could file for divorce within the first three years of marriage if she could prove that she had suffered exceptional hardship at the hands of her husband. The decision as to whether that requirement had been met was taken on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific circumstances. Notwithstanding that requirement, spouses could choose to separate at any time, which offered a way out of situations of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence were entitled to apply for a personal protection order and/or a domestic exclusion order and had recourse to counselling services. To breach such an order constituted a criminal offence.

79. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that the practice of prostitution was confined to certain areas. The activities of sex workers and their employers were monitored to ensure that they complied with applicable laws and regulations and to prevent organized criminal groups from gaining a foothold in the sex industry and exploiting sex workers. While prostitution did not constitute a criminal offence in and of itself, many of the exploitative activities associated with it did. Those activities included living off the immoral earnings of a sex worker and trafficking a sex worker to Singapore for the purpose of prostitution.

80. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that there was no law regulating the foreign bride trade in Singapore.

81. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that, while the current policy was designed to facilitate the stay of the foreign spouses of Singaporean citizens in the country, the Government still needed to determine whether the marriage was stable before granting a foreign spouse permanent residence or Singaporean citizenship. Applications for permanent residence or citizenship submitted by foreign spouses were subject to a comprehensive assessment before a decision was taken. Under the Long-Term Visit Pass Plus scheme, the foreign spouses of Singaporean citizens were allowed to remain in the country for an initial period of two years and then for a further five years upon renewal. Foreign spouses in possession of a Long-Term Visit Pass were entitled to health-care subsidies and unemployment benefits on an equal footing with permanent residents. In 2015, the Government had introduced a procedure known as the Pre-Marriage Long-Term Visit Pass Assessment to provide Singaporean citizens and their foreign partners with greater clarity on the foreign partner's eligibility for a residence permit prior to marriage.

82. **Ms. Manalo**, noting that article 377 (a) of the Penal Code explicitly prohibited same-sex relations between men, said she took it that same-sex relations between women were also criminalized. It was her understanding that no organization representing LGBTI persons had been successful in registering as a legal entity and that those persons struggled to gain employment in the civil service or faced discrimination when they did. Transgender persons also reportedly being mistreated by social and health workers. Furthermore, the State's media broadcast policy urged broadcasters to exercise utmost caution in transmitting information on or making use of themes or subplots depicting non-heterosexual lifestyles and to present them in a way that did not promote, justify or glamorize such lifestyles. Explicit depictions of a non-heterosexual lifestyle were effectively prohibited. Such censorship amounted to a violation of non-heterosexual women's human rights. The delegation should describe the measures taken by the State party to safeguard the rights of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women in Singapore.

83. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that LGBTI persons were very much a part of Singaporean society, enjoyed equal access to education, employment and social

support and were free to lead their lives in private. Despite recent shifts in public attitudes towards that community, the majority of the Singaporean population continued to uphold heterosexual relationships as the norm. Singaporean law therefore reflected the values espoused by mainstream society. It was not the Government's role to spearhead policy changes related to contentious issues that could have a polarizing effect on Singaporean society. The Government would, however, continue to engage in dialogue on the issue of the rights of sexual minorities.

84. As for the restrictions imposed by the Singaporean media broadcast policy on content of interest to the LGBTI community, the Government had moved away from outright censorship in favour of a classification system under which only content labelled as "adult" was restricted. While adults were free to access content of interest to the LGBTI community in the privacy of their own homes, such content was still not shown during free-to-air television broadcasts, as it could be viewed by children. That approach served to prevent children from viewing inappropriate content while giving adults the choice to view such content if they so desired. The LGBTI community was represented in all employment sectors. Diverse sexual orientation was not a bar to employment or professional advancement or a ground for dismissal. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices had formulated guidelines for fair employment practices by which employers had to abide in the recruitment, selection and remuneration of employees. Employees who believed that they had been unfairly dismissed had a legal entitlement to challenge that decision with a view to possible reinstatement. Sexual orientation and gender identity had been a subject of discussion within public forums in Singapore. The general public could share their opinions on that subject with policymakers through various feedback channels.

Articles 7 to 9

85. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be useful to receive statistical data, disaggregated by sex, on women's participation in corporate life. She would also appreciate additional information on the number of women serving in the Singaporean diplomatic service and in international organizations. Had the State party taken any steps to encourage women to seek careers in those fields?

86. **Ms. Hayashi** said that the State party was to be commended for having amended its Constitution to allow children born to a Singaporean mother after 15 May 2004 to acquire Singaporean citizenship by descent. However, despite that reform, there were reportedly still a large number of stateless children living in the country. She would welcome statistical data, disaggregated by sex, age and ethnicity, on the number of stateless persons currently residing in the State party. She asked whether any studies had been conducted on children born to Singaporean mothers prior to the amendment of the Constitution who had been denied Singaporean citizenship and who had become stateless as a result. It would also be useful to hear more about the measures taken by the State party to tackle the problem of statelessness.

87. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that 44 per cent of the country's foreign service officers were women. A number of Singaporean women currently occupied high-level positions in international organizations. Stateless persons could apply for and acquire Singaporean citizenship if they met the criteria related to financial contributions, qualifications, family profile and length of stay. Citizenship applications submitted by stateless persons were considered on a case-by-case basis. The extent to which such persons had integrated into Singaporean society and their potential to contribute to the country were also taken into account.

88. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that children could also apply for a residence permit under the Long-Term Visit Pass Plus scheme. The delegation was not in a position to provide disaggregated statistical data on the number of stateless persons currently living in Singapore. The large number of such persons was attributable, at least in part, to the fact that some had renounced the citizenship of their country of origin before arrival and not qualified for Singaporean citizenship or that their parents had failed to register their birth in their country of origin.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.