

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOME OF THE 23RD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)

Part 1: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

The Singapore Government's goal for gender equality remains unchanged - equal opportunities for men and women on the basis of meritocracy. Built upon that is the availability of fundamental resources such as education and healthcare for all citizens so that men and women have the same opportunities to pursue their personal goals and gain access to all spheres in society.

Key Achievements

2 The Government has made significant strides in the advancement of women's issues and rights in Singapore. The following are some of the key milestones.

Change in Citizenship Law

3 In April 2004, the Singapore Parliament passed a bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore to allow overseas-born children to acquire Singapore citizenship by descent. 2005 Women's Empowerment and Protection Act (WEP Act) (by Parliament pa)

Withdrawal of marital immunity under certain circumstances

7 It is now an offence for a husband to engage in non-consensual sexual intercourse with the withdrawal of marital immunity under certain prescribed circumstances which signal a break-down in the marriage and consent to conjugal relations.

13 On 1 August 2007, Singapore presented the Third Report to the Committee. The delegation was led by Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

14 As a responsible member of the international community, Singapore takes a serious view of its international obligations to treaties such as the CEDAW.

Non-Governmental Organisations and Associations

20 The following 3 key women bodies represent more than 90% of women's groups in Singapore:

- (i) The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), which is the umbrella body for women's organisations in Singapore;
- (ii) The Women's Integration Network (WIN) Council under the People's Association, which runs programmes for women at the community level and provides leader

Part 2: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

Education of Women

25 The Government remains committed to providing all Singaporeans, both girls and boys, with equal access to quality education. To realise this aspiration, the Government invests a sizeable amount for education annually. For example in 2007, 3.4% of Singapore's GDP (S\$7.5 billion or US\$5.5 billion) was allocated for education.

26 Singapore has achieved a high literacy rate for women. The literacy rate of resident females aged 15 years and over was 93.8% in 2007, up from 89% in 2000.

27 Female students make up more than half the full-time student intake at the local universities today. In addition, women are well-represented in traditionally male-dominated subjects. The intake of females to the following courses in 2007 reflect this:

at the universities, women made up 80% of the health sciences course, 69.1% of the architecture & building course and 66.2% of the natural, physical and mathematical science course;

at the polytechnics, women made up 78.3% of the health sciences course, 69.2% of the legal studies course and 62% of the science and related technologies course; and

at the ITE, women made up 60.4% of the applied and health sciences course and 39.1% of the info-communications technology course.

28 To achieve the twin objectives of giving our children a core set of knowledge and skills, and providing a common educational experience, the Government has made six-year primary school education in national schools compulsory. This took effect with the cohort entering Primary One in 2003. In

30 The policy change has resulted in a significant rise in the number of women enrolling in medical school. In 2007, 115 women were admitted to the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the NUS – making up nearly half of the cohort. In addition, three in four of the first batch of 26 new Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School students were women.

Women & The Economy

31 In 2007, 54% of the resident female population aged 15 and over in Singapore were in the workforce. Although the female labour force participation

women face by facilitating better work-life balance through longer paid maternity and childcare leave for both parents and providing financial support for parents to raise and care for their children.

37 To many working Singaporean women, the main highlight of the M&P Package is the extended government-paid maternity leave, which is extended from 12 weeks to 16 weeks. New mothers have the flexibility of taking the last eight weeks of their maternity leave over 12 months from the birth of the child. There are other leave benefits, such as childcare and unpaid infant care leave.

38 Apart from the increased tax incentives for parents, working women also enjoy greater tax benefits from the Working Mother's Child Relief. The relief is 15 percent and 20 percent of the mother's earned income for the first and second child respectively, and 25 percent per child for the third and subsequent child, up to a maximum of 100 percent of the mother's earned income.

39 The enhanced Baby Bonus is also welcomed by many. The S\$4,000 cash gift for the first and second child and S\$6,000 for the third and fourth child help meet the increased expenses during pregnancy and birth. The Children Development Account, which is a dollar-for-dollar government matching contribution, helps pay for the child's educational and medical needs.

Women in Politics & Decision-making

40 Female representation in the Singapore Parliament has been increasing. Based on data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as at 30 Nov 2008, Singapore is ranked 38 out of 189 countries in terms of the percentage of women in the Lower or single House. Singapore's 25% of women in Parliament currently exceeds IPU's world average of 18.4 percent (both Houses combined).

41 Women have a choice in deciding if they want to enter politics. Although more women are increasingly holding their own in the economic sphere, many still shy away from politics due to the desire for privacy. While we have made progress, there is still more that we can learn from other countries on how to encourage more women to participate in politics. The Government is optimistic that as Singaporean women become more educated, more will consider entering politics. Such a change takes time, and Singapore remains committed to this long-term effort.

42 As at April 2008, 5 of the 23 Permanent Secretaries were female and there were 7 female Deputy Secretaries out of a total of 28. We now have eight female Heads of Mission and an almost equal number of men and women working in the UN Secretariat. A Singaporean, Ms Noeleen Heyzer, has been appointed the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Women & Health

43 The Singapore Government accords a high priority on healthcare. Aside from granting women equal access to healthcare resources, it also pays special attention to women's healthcare needs. These high standards are supported by the following figures:

- (a) Life expectancy at birth for women increased from 80.4 years in 2001 to 82.9 years in 2007; and
- (b) Singapore's maternal mortality rate is also amongst the lowest in the world, at 8 per 100,000 live and still-births in 2007.

44 Singapore not only grants women equal access to healthcare resources, but also pays attention to the special healthcare needs of women. Special attention is paid to female illnesses and programmes have been organised specifically for women such as subsidised breast and cervical cancer screenings.

Women & The Media

45 The Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) sets clear media guidelines prohibiting the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and sexually-discriminating values. In the case of broadcast media, the guidelines state that programmes should not make careless discriminating references to any class or group of people, whether based on race, gender, disability or occupational status. In addition, the guidelines regulate the behaviour of broadcasters by disallowing the use of insensitive jokes that might cause hurt to any persons.

46 The Free-to-Air Television Programme Code requires that programmes send a strong signal against any form of non-consenting sexual relations (for example rape or indecent assault). It disallows demeaning and hurting sexual stereotypes. Besides content guidelines that safeguard the interests of women, MDA also supports programmes that cater to women, such as "Rogue", a talk show which focuses on issues and trends concerning Singaporean women, and "Women on Top", another talk show which invites female celebrities and politicians to share their views and thoughts on current affairs, politics, entertainment and social issues.

47 The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) sets similar standards as MDA. There are guidelines that prohibit negative stereotyping that could potentially hurt any segment of society. Lewd slogans and suggestive pictures used to promote matchmaking services had already been axed from Singapore's newspapers and magazines in 2007. ASAS introduced stricter guidelines in March 2008 to specify that matchmaking ads must be in text (without pictures); the ads have to state that marriages are not guaranteed; and the ads are restricted to a certain section (classified section for advertisements)

of the newspapers and magazines. Only dating agencies accredited by MCYS were exempted from the guidelines.

Symposium had as its theme “Men and Family Violence: Mobilising Men; Mobilising Resources”. A distinguished keynote speaker from the United States as well as local experts were invited to share their programmes and services with the aim of understanding, engaging and mobilising men to end family violence. This was followed by a two-week publicity campaign in November where print, television, radio and poster publicity, roadshows and outreach talks at workplaces were organised to reach out to men.

Public Education

53 MCYS works with the media and magazines to educate the public on family violence through articles and advertisements. The focus has largely been preventive in nature, emphasising the identification of signs of family violence and the need to seek help early. Public education materials like pamphlets and

57 The direct and indirect benefits of having a sound, corruption-free and efficient system are available to all Singaporeans, regardless of sex, age or ethnicity.

Institutions for the Advancement of Women's Status in Singapore

62 Singapore has two main national bodies overseeing women-related matters. They are the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on CEDAW which was set up in 1996 to monitor Singapore's implementation of the Convention and the Women's Desk, which was established in 2002 as the national focal point for women matters. The Women's Desk is also the secretariat for the IMC on CEDAW.

63 The Women's Desk conducts gender analysis and analyses trends to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of gender-sensitive measures and policies. Gender-disaggregated data is collated from Ministries and agencies and published on the Women's Desk webpage. These readily-accessible statistics are a valuable resource for gender research and informs the public about the state of women locally.

Gender Analysis

64 In the formulation and review of policies, Singapore adopts a stakeholder approach which analyses the policy impact on affected groups. As many policy issues are cross-cutting, a "whole of government" approach is adopted whereby consultation with other relevant ministries are done before government agencies submit policy papers to Cabinet for consideration.

65 This stakeholder approach encompasses taking a gender-sensitive perspective on issues that have differing impacts on women and men. An example is in the treatment and response to Singapore's ageing population where health-related issues differ for men and women. Another instance is that older women tend to have fewer financial resources as a result of their lower educational levels and the tendency to disrupt their careers or drop out of the labour force for family reasons.

66 The perennial problem of low fertility rates has been an issue which is high on the Government's agenda. In 2008, the Government introduced a suite of marriage and parenthood measures to promote marriage and to boost the low birth rates. Views from various stakeholders were sought through public dialogues, feedback and focus group discussions. On 6 May 2008, the National Family Council (NFC) organised a focus group discussion with women's groups to seek their views on Singapore's marriage and parenthood concerns and measures. Areas for discussion covered marriage, work-life and childcare support.

Strengthening of Institutional Capabilities

67 The Singapore Government supports and facilitates the strengthening of institutional capabilities of the various agencies to enhance the status of women.

We believe that gender training is necessary to build capacity in gender analysis and planning as well as to increase gender awareness and sensitivity. Besides strengthening inter-Ministry cooperation through regular exchanges, IMC members are also invited to conferences and seminars on gender mainstreaming and CEDAW both locally and overseas to enable them to share their experiences and learn from the best practices of other economies. The Women's Desk has conducted briefings on Singapore's commitments to CEDAW.

68 In addition to national efforts, regional and international collaborations are valuable platforms to foster partnerships amongst different nations. Regular opportunities to discuss gender equality issues and gender mainstreaming help to generate greater awareness of issues facing women in the international arena, and also provide governments with the opportunity to coordinate efforts and share best practices and expertise to improve the lives of women around the world.

Participation at Regional and International Meetings

69 The Women's Desk actively participates in regional and international

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