

# National Report for Singapore's Universal Periodic Review

## I. Introduction

### A. Report overview and methodology

Singapore's report for the Universal Periodic Review has been prepared in line with the General Guidelines for the Preparation of Information under the Universal Periodic Review contained in Document A/HRC/6/L.24.

2 In preparing the report, the Government conducted broad consultations with local stakeholders from government and non-governmental organisations active in the promotion of human rights as well as members of civil society. Further elaboration on the information contained in this report can be found at "<http://www.mfa.gov.sg/upr>".

## II. Background on Singapore

### A. Singapore's History and Population

3 Singapore is small, compact and diverse. It is an island city-state of 5.07 million people, comprising 3.23 million citizens, 541,000 foreign citizens with Permanent Resident status and another 1.31 million foreign citizens working/studying in the country. With a land area of just 710 sq km, Singapore is among the most densely populated countries in the world, with 6814 persons per sq km.

4 Largely descended from immigrants, Singapore's resident population is ethnically diverse, with 74.1% of them Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9.2% Indian and 3.3% Others. It is also multi-religious, with a population that is 42.5% Buddhist, 14.9% Muslim, 14.6% Christian, 8.5% Taoist, 4% Hindu, and the remainder of numerous other faiths. Singapore's first chief minister was Jewish; four out of six of its heads of state since independence have been from minority races.

5 The official languages of Singapore are English, Malay, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil. The languages most frequently spoken at home are English (28.1%), Mandarin Chinese (36.0%), other Chinese dialects (18.2%), Malay (13.2%) and Tamil (3.1%). The language of both government and education is English.

6 Singapore left the Federation of Malaysia and became an independent state on 9 August 1965. Being the descendants of immigrants, its people had no conception of Singapore as a nation with a shared history. A multi-racial, multi-religious population living in close proximity to one another meant that there was strong potential for tensions. The Maria Hertogh/Nadrah religious riots of 1950, in which 18 people were killed, and the race riots of 1964, while Singapore was a part of Malaysia, in which 36 people were killed and 556 injured, were searing, defining events in Singapore's history.

7 For this reason, maintaining racial and religious harmony has been the top priority bar none of Singapore's governing institutions. By managing, delicately and scrupulously, relations among the different races and religions – and equally importantly, by never hesitating to take firm action against any group that threatened racial or religious harmony – Singapore has avoided major incidents of sectarian violence since its independence.

8 There have been a few instances in Singapore's history when extremists have attempted to disrupt racial harmony and even to overthrow the Government by violent means. In 1961, there was the Angkatan Revolusi Tentara Islam Singapura (Revolutionary Islamic Army of Singapore); in 1981, the Singapore People's Liberation Organisation. More recently, there has been Jemaah Islamiyah, a terrorist organisation that has plotted attacks on diplomatic missions and other targets in Singapore. These threats to our existence have reaffirmed Singapore's commitment to secularism and to the principle that all its citizens are equal under the law, regardless of race, language or religion.

9 Singapore has also faced other severe threats to its existence – most notably, the attempt by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) to take over both Singapore and Malaya through insurrection. This was at the time of the Vietnam wars involving the French, and subsequently America. The Communist threat to both Singapore and Malaysia only ended in 1989, after CPM signed a peace agreement with the Malaysian and Thai governments.

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## **B. Singapore's Political System**

10 Singapore is a parliamentary republic. Its Constitution vests legislative power in the Legislature, which consists of the President and Parliament, while judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court and subordinate courts. Executive authority is vested in the President, who calls

upon whoever commands a majority in Parliament to be Prime Minister. In practice, the Prime Minister is the leader of the majority party in Parliament. The Prime Minister chooses a Cabinet from among the Members of Parliament (MPs).

11 Parliamentary elections must be held every five years. There is universal adult suffrage and voting is compulsory. There are two types of constituencies: single-member constituencies and group representation constituencies (GRCs). GRCs elect teams of between four to six members, at least one of whom must be from an ethnic minority to ensure that ethnic minorities are adequately represented in Parliament. In addition to elected MPs, there may be up to nine “non-constituency” MPs (consisting of the “best losers” among opposition parties) and up to nine nominated MPs. The still-evolving system combines the stability of the first-past-the-post system of Westminster-style democracies with the breadth and fairness of proportional representation. Nominated MPs and Non-Constituency MPs may speak in Parliament and vote on all measures other than those relating to money bills, presidential impeachment, no-confidence motions and constitutional amendments.

12 There are currently 26 registered political parties in Singapore. The People’s Action Party first formed the Government in 1959 and has won successive general elections since. In the most recent General Elections in 2006, it gained 67% of the votes cast and 82 out of the 84 elected parliamentary seats.

13 Singapore has held without fail regular general elections since achieving independence. The constitutional government in Singapore also has not been interrupted once by extra-constitutional emergency or military rule. At no point in the history of independent Singapore has the Constitutional government or electoral process ever been suspended.

### **C. Socio-economic Development of Singapore**

14 At independence in 1965, Singapore’s economy was dependent on entrepot trade and British military bases on the island. The literacy rate was low, unemployment was high, and housing and healthcare were poor.

15 Today, Singapore’s literacy rate is 96%. Its economy is highly sophisticated, with a GDP per capita that has risen a hundredfold since 1965. Singapore ranks 23rd out of 182 countries with a score of 0.944 on the

UNDP's Human Development Index, a significant improvement from its 1980 score of 0.785.

16 As Singapore developed, it has progressively enhanced the protection of human rights, particularly the rights of specific groups such as women, children, migrant workers and the disabled.

#### **D. Governance**

17 The Government believes that human rights are not just a matter of promulgating laws, but also of enforcing those laws fairly. Good governance includes the effective implementation of policies and the delivery of public services.

18 Global surveys have consistently ranked Singapore highly. Its legal system has been ranked among the top in the world by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) and Political & Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd (PERC)<sup>1</sup>. In the 2009-10 WEF Global Competitiveness Report, out of 133 countries, Singapore's legal system was ranked first for its efficiency in settling disputes and fourth for its efficiency in challenging regulations. The 2010 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Singapore Asia's best country to work in. In the 2009 World Bank Governance Index, Singapore was rated first for Regulatory Quality. Singapore had the highest Potential Net Migration Index in a 2010 Gallup global survey<sup>2</sup>, indicating its desirability as a destination for migrants. Singapore was also rated as having the best quality of life in Asia by Mercer Human Resource Consulting in their 2010 Quality of Living Survey.

19 Singapore believes that a clean and transparent government is essential for good governance and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. If public officials are corrupt, the rule of law and the protection of human rights would be impossible. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau was established in 1952 to investigate and prevent corruption in Singapore. Corrupt Ministers and officials have been charged in Court and sent to jail. In 2010, Singapore was jointly ranked the least corrupt country in the world (together with Denmark and New Zealand) in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010" published by the WEF, "World Competitiveness Yearbook 2010" published by IMD, and PERC Asian Intelligence Reports.

<sup>2</sup> Potential Net Migration Index by Gallup

## **E. Human Rights in the Singapore Context**

20 As a young city-state with a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual population, Singapore has no margin for error. We insist on the rule of law to ensure stability, equality and social justice. Stability and security are the prerequisites of economic growth, which in turn enables Singaporeans to be fed, housed and educated. Singapore has achieved all this while respecting the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Singapore Constitution.

21 But Singapore is still evolving. We recognise that as the demands of our people change over time, so too must our goals and policies.

### **III. The Constitutional and legal framework for the protection of human rights in Singapore**

#### **A. Singapore's Constitution**

22 The Singapore Constitution is the supreme law of Singapore. Part IV of the Constitution enshrines and protects a range of fundamental liberties, including the right to life and liberty, freedom of speech, assembly and association, and the freedom of religion. As in other national constitutions and human rights instruments, these provisions are not couched in absolute terms. They may be restricted by law in the interest of security or public order.

23 The Constitution also guarantees due process and fair trial, including prohibiting retrospective criminal laws, repeated trials, and evidence obtained by means of torture. It prohibits slavery and forced labour, and protects all citizens from banishment or exclusion from Singapore.

24 Apart from the right of equal protection, the Constitution carries specific provisions for the protection of racial and religious minorities. It imposes a responsibility on the Government to care for the interests of racial and religious minorities in Singapore. In addition, the Government is enjoined to recognise the special position of Malays, the indigenous people of Singapore. It has the responsibility to protect, support and promote the political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests of Malays.

## **B. Consultations with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and stakeholders**

25 The Government views all citizens as stakeholders, so many draft pieces of legislation, including those relating to human rights, are open for public consultation. Individuals and groups are invited to make submissions or to attend dialogue sessions. For example, in July 2008 and January 2011, CSOs, students and educators, among others, met to discuss Singapore's progress in the promotion and protection of children's rights. CSOs working in the area of migrant worker welfare regularly provide feedback and suggestions to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM).

26 As a signal of Singapore's commitment to encourage an active citizenry, REACH (Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry at Home), the lead Government agency for engaging citizens, was launched in October 2006.

## **C. Judicial System**

27 Article 93 of the Constitution vests judicial power in Singapore in the Supreme Court and "such subordinate courts as may be provided by any written law for the time being in force."

28 The Supreme Court consists of the High Court and the Court of Appeal. The Judges of the Supreme Court comprise the Chief Justice, the Judges of Appeal, Judges and Judicial Commissioners. Article 98 of the Constitution sets out special provisions to safeguard the tenure of office and the independence of the Judges of the Supreme Court. The High Court has the power to review the constitutionality of legislative and administrative action.

## **D. International Commitments**

29 Singapore is a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Singapore acceded to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Singapore has ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption. Singapore acceded to the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (HCCAICA) in December 2010.

30 Singapore is also a party to many Conventions under the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These include the Forced Labour

Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182). Most recently, Singapore ratified the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention 1976 (No. 144) in 2010.

31 Singapore is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is hence represented on the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the overarching human rights institution in ASEAN, as well as on the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. Singapore is also involved in developing an ASEAN Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

32 The Singapore Government takes its treaty obligations very seriously and prefers not to sign Conventions until it is sure it can comply fully with all their obligations. Our focus is on the full and effective implementation of treaty commitments. At the same time, we continue to study and actively review our policies to see if we can ratify more international human rights treaties.

#### **IV. Protection of Human Rights in Singapore: Achievements, Best Practices, Challenges, and Constraints**

33 Singapore fully subscribes to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We respect the principle of the universality of human rights and consider human rights to be indivisible, with economic, social and cultural rights as important as civil and political rights. The manner in which all rights are attained and implemented must nevertheless take cognisance of specific national circumstances and aspirations.

##### **A. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

34 As Singapore develops economically, we recognise that our economic, social and cultural policies must evolve to meet new aspirations. But regardless of the stage of development, we believe that delivering better living standards to Singaporeans is predicated on good governance.

## 1. Education

35 Singapore's education system has evolved since 1959, when Singapore attained self-government from the British. In the colonial era, each community set up its own schools, taught in its own language, and used textbooks from its native lands. To build social cohesion, Singapore established a national education system. Bilingualism was made compulsory in 1966, with English as the main language of instruction.

36 To ensure that all our children are equipped with a common core of knowledge, the Government passed the Compulsory Education Act<sup>3</sup> in 2003, which mandates compulsory education for the first 6 years of primary education. More than 98% of students complete at least 10 years of general education, and more than 93% proceed to post-secondary institutions. The Government ensures education is affordable for all through subsidies and financial assistance.

37 The "ability-based, aspirations driven" model of education today is based on the belief that every child has different talents and these should be realised to their fullest. To provide greater choice, specialised schools focusing on sports, mathematics and science, science and technology, and the arts have been created. There are also schools for students who are unable to progress through the mainstream academic system and are at risk of prematurely leaving school. Singapore's education system aims to develop all-rounded individuals – morally, intellectually, physically, socially and aesthetically.

38 The OECD, and McKinsey and Company have cited Singapore as a success story in their reports<sup>4</sup> surveying education systems across the world. One of the factors of success identified by these reports was Singapore's commitment to meritocratic values where hard work/performance paid off for students regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. In the 2009 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, Singapore had the second highest proportion (12.3%) of top performers in all 3 domains of evaluation (Reading, Mathematics and Science). Almost half of our students from the bottom quarter of socio-economic background scored better in Reading than predicted, higher than the OECD average (30%).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The link to the Act can be found at "[http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-51&doctitle=COMPULSORY%20EDUCATION%20ACT](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-51&doctitle=COMPULSORY%20EDUCATION%20ACT)".

<sup>4</sup> "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers" published by the OECD and "How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better" published by McKinsey and Company.

<sup>5</sup> This is better than the OECD average, where only 30% of the students from the bottom quarter of socio-economic background scored better in Reading than their circumstances might have predicted.



## 2. Health

39 The World Health Organisation's World Health Report ranks Singapore's healthcare system the best in Asia and 6<sup>th</sup> best in the world. Life expectancy in 2008 was 80.9 years, having risen from just 60 in 1965. Singapore's infant mortality was 2.1 per 1,000 live births in 2008, one of the lowest in the world, compared to 26.3 per 1,000 live births in 1965.

40 Singapore adheres to the principle that good and affordable basic medical services should be available to all citizens. We also recognise the importance of public health and sanitation. All Singaporeans have access to clean water and sanitation.

41 Singapore has evolved a mixed financing system for healthcare, with multiple layers of protection to ensure that no Singaporean is denied access to basic healthcare. The Government subsidises up to 80% of the total bill in acute public hospital wards, which all Singaporeans can access<sup>6</sup> and which accounts for 80% of the acute care sector. Subsidies are also available for primary, intermediate and long-term care. Singaporeans also contribute to Medisave, an individual medical savings account that enables them to pay for their share of medical treatment. Working Singaporeans and their employers deposit a part of the monthly wage into the account. Most Singaporeans are enrolled in MediShield, a low cost catastrophic medical insurance scheme. ElderShield, a severe disability insurance, is also available to guard against the financial risks of suffering a severe disability. Many middle and upper income Singaporeans supplement their basic coverage with private insurance policies. For Singaporeans who cannot afford to pay their medical bills despite the extensive subsidies, the Government has set up Medifund, a medical endowment fund, to act as the ultimate safety net.

42 By means of the mixed financing system, market-based mechanisms to promote competition and the adoption of technology to improve the delivery of healthcare services, Singapore has secured good healthcare outcomes for its population. It has done so with a national healthcare expenditure of below 4% of its GDP, although this is expected to grow with an ageing population.

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<sup>6</sup> 65% of acute hospital beds in Singapore are subsidised. Subsidised wards are differentiated by their physical amenities - e.g. number of beds per room and air-conditioning - not the level of care provided. The level of subsidy accorded is also means-tested.

### **3. Housing**

43 Singapore provides affordable housing through public housing subsidy schemes, and heavily subsidised rental housing for those who cannot own their flats. About 80% of the population lives in public housing built by Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB). More than 90% of Singaporeans own their homes, giving them a secure roof over their heads, as well as an asset whose value grows with Singapore's economy.

44 Before the 1960s, most Singaporeans lived in over-crowded slums. Today, Singapore's public housing programme has gone beyond providing basic housing to building award-winning homes and environmentally friendly housing estates. The HDB has been acclaimed locally and internationally. It was the only institution from Asia among the 12 worldwide to receive the 2008 UN Public Service Award for its Home Ownership Programme. HDB subsequently won the 2010 UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award for providing one of Asia's and the world's greenest, cleanest and most socially conscious housing programmes.

45 To ensure that housing remains affordable, we provide generous subsidies to help Singaporeans own their first flat, with additional subsidies for lower-income families. For homeowners in financial difficulty, HDB assists them with short-term measures such as the temporary deferment or reduction of mortgage loan repayments, while working with them on longer-term solutions.

46 A small proportion of the population who cannot afford home ownership is assisted by the Public Rental Scheme, which allows them to rent flats from HDB at heavily subsidised rates.

### **4. Employment and other Labour Issues**

47 Employment is high, with 77.1% of the resident population aged 25 to 64 employed as of June 2010. Unemployment is very low, with the overall seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate of 2.2% in June 2010.

48 Singapore's workforce has consistently been rated among the best in the world by the IMD, Business Environment Risk Intelligence (BERI), PERC and the WEF. Singapore's harmonious labour relations are also widely recognised. Singapore was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2010 for productive labour relations and joint 1<sup>st</sup> (together with Austria, Jordan and Luxembourg) for the absence of industrial disputes by the World Competitiveness Yearbook.

49 With globalisation and technological change, the Government recognises that workforce development is essential for every worker to remain relevant. A national Continuing Education and Training (CET) infrastructure was developed to equip adult workers with the relevant skills and competencies. Of significance is the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ), which is a national credentialing system to train, develop, assess and recognise individuals for competencies that companies are looking for. There are now 24 different WSQ frameworks, covering various industries.

50 Tripartism is the cornerstone of Singapore's harmonious labour relations. It involves the three partners – unions, government and employers – working together. Singapore's unions represent workers in collective bargaining as well as on other matters. At their apex is the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), a federation of trades unions that was first established in 1961. Employers are similarly represented by the Singapore National Employers' Federation. As a result of our tripartite approach, Singapore has enjoyed industrial peace for more than four decades. Our last strike was in 1986.

51 Tripartism has enabled Singapore to weather many economic storms. For example, one of the key initiatives of the tripartite partners during the recent global financial crisis was to advise companies to implement various cost cutting measures instead of retrenching workers as the first resort. This proved effective; Singapore's total unemployment rate in 2009 was 3%, lower compared to almost all developed economies. Singapore enjoyed a net creation of 37,600 jobs in 2009 despite the recession.

52 The Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices ensures that workers are hired on the basis of merit and are not discriminated against on the grounds of age, gender or other non-work-related factors.

53 Singapore has in place a comprehensive suite of labour legislation to ensure that the employment rights and conditions of workers are safeguarded. For example, the Employment Act (EA), which protects both foreign and local workers, prescribes minimum employment terms and conditions such as work hours, rest days and sick leave provisions. Enhancements to the EA in 2008 included expanded coverage and the reduction of the qualifying employment period for paid sick leave from 6 to 3 months.

54 In addition to the EA, the Workplace Safety and Health Act and the Work Injury Compensation Act govern safe working conditions and worker compensation in the event of work-related injuries.

55 Low-wage, contract and casual workers are not neglected. The Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) was introduced in 2007 to supplement the wages and Central Provident Fund savings of older low-wage workers to encourage them to remain employed.

56 A new three-year long Workfare Training Support (WTS) scheme was launched in 2010 to complement the WIS. WTS encourages older low-wage workers to upgrade their skills and improve their employability by providing incentives for their employers to send them for training, and encourages them to commit to such training. The Government also has a Work Support Programme, which helps workers from low-income households upgrade their skills by providing them with temporary financial, medical and educational assistance.<sup>7</sup>

57 Through our investments in education, job creation, health and housing, we have managed to achieve relatively low levels of poverty. The number of full-time employed residents with gross monthly income from work of S\$1,200 and below fell significantly from 363,700 in 2006 to 262,700 in 2010.

58 From time to time, the Government shares its fiscal surpluses with Singaporeans such as through the S\$2.6 billion Progress Package in 2006, and the S\$2 billion Growth Dividends package in 2008. In disbursing such packages, greater weight is given to lower income groups, senior citizens and school children. The Government has also introduced assistance packages in times of need, such as the S\$4 billion Goods and Services Tax (GST) Offset Package in 2007-2010 to help offset the GST increase from 5% to 7%, and the S\$2.6 billion Resilience Package in 2009 to help Singaporeans cope with the economic downturn.

## **5. Social Security**

59 Singapore's social security system is premised on self-reliance, a strong work ethic and family and community support. The system consists of five main components: (i) housing; (ii) universal healthcare coverage; (iii)

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<sup>7</sup> From 2006 to 2008, a total of S\$33.4 million was spent on Work Support to help, on average, over 3,600 families each year.

retirement savings; (iv) Workfare<sup>8</sup>, which encourages low-income Singaporeans to work and achieve self-sufficiency; and (v) the Government's Community Care Endowment Fund (ComCare Fund), which provides support to low income Singaporean families. The fund's programmes provide a basic safety net for poor Singaporeans while helping them to work towards self-reliance. ComCare also provides assistance to those who need long-term support such as the elderly without family support or disabled persons.

60 The Central Provident Fund (CPF) underpins the first three components of the system. It is a mandatory, defined contribution social security scheme that helps Singaporeans save for housing, medical and retirement needs. Income supplements and training incentives under Workfare, the fourth component, are also administered through the CPF system.<sup>9</sup>

## **B. Protection of Rights of Special Groups**

61 Singapore is working continually to improve our protection of the rights of special groups in the country.

### **1. Women**

62 The Government has made significant progress in the advancement of women's rights in Singapore. According to the UN's Human Development Report (HDR) 2009, Singapore was ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the world for gender empowerment. Gender equality in Singapore is founded on the principle of equal opportunities for men and women on the basis of meritocracy.

63 Women in Singapore receive strong legal protections. Their rights are protected in the Constitution as well as in legislation like the Employment Act, the Women's Charter, Children and Young Persons Act, and the Penal Code.

64 The Women's Charter governs matters relating to marriage and divorce under civil law. Enacted in 1961, the Charter provides the legal basis for the rights and responsibilities between husband and wife. Its provisions include entitling the wife to a share of the matrimonial property and protecting the wife and children from a violent husband.

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<sup>8</sup> More information on Workfare can be found at "<http://www.wis.sg>".

<sup>9</sup> Information on the CPF system can be found at "<http://www.cpf.gov.sg/>".

65 Singapore has two sets of laws governing marriages: The Women's Charter governs civil marriages, and the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) governs Muslim marriages.<sup>10</sup> The Family Court administers the dissolution of civil marriages and the Syariah Court<sup>11</sup> administers the dissolution of Muslim marriages. However, Muslim women are not denied the protection of the Women's Charter, for Syariah Court orders are enforced by the Family Court.

66 The Fatwa Committee<sup>12</sup> regularly discusses points of Muslim law and makes recommendations on new measures, including gender equality. According to a fatwa (religious ruling) issued in August 2006, Muslim women can be appointed to the Appeal Board,<sup>13</sup> which hears appeals on Syariah Court decisions. Muslim women have since been appointed to the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore or Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) and the Appeal Board. The current Registrar of the Syariah Court is a woman.

67 The Government provides all Singaporean children, girls as well as boys, equal access to quality education. As a result, Singapore has achieved a high literacy rate for women. The literacy rate of resident females aged 15 years and over was 94.7% in 2009, up from 89% in 2000. Female students make up more than half the full-time intake at local universities. Indeed, women are now well represented in subjects that were traditionally viewed as male domains. For example, in the 2009 intake at Singapore universities, women made up 58.5% of the health sciences course, 58.5% of the architecture & building course and 57.3% of the natural, physical and mathematical science course.

68 In 2009, 55.2% of the resident female population aged 15 and over in Singapore were in the workforce. Although the female labour force participation rate still lags that of the males (76.3%), the gap has narrowed over the decade. In 1999, the corresponding labour force participation rates

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<sup>10</sup> Under Article 153 of the Singapore Constitution, the legislature is required to enact laws for regulating Muslim religious affairs. In 1966, Parliament enacted the Administration of the Muslim Law Act (AMLA), which came into force on 1 July 1968. AMLA established the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), the Registry of Muslim Marriages and the Syariah Court.

<sup>11</sup> The Syariah Court is constituted under AMLA to hear and determine all actions and proceedings that involve disputes relating to, among others, marriage and divorces in which all the parties are Muslims or where the parties were married under the provisions of Muslim law.

<sup>12</sup> The Fatwa Committee is an independent body of Muslim scholars, appointed by the President of Singapore to deliberate on issues concerning Muslim law.

<sup>13</sup> The Appeal Board is constituted under AMLA to hear appeals on Syariah Court decisions. The Appeal Board may confirm, reverse or vary the decision of the Syariah Court, exercise any such powers as the Syariah Court could have exercised, make such order as the Syariah Court ought to have made or order a retrial or award costs if it thinks fit.

were 77.8% for males and 50.7% for females. The gender income gap has also narrowed. In 2009, the median gross monthly income of full-time employed females was 92.0% that of males, up from 84.4% in 1999. Women also make up an increasing proportion amongst employers in Singapore – 24.4% in 2009, up from 16.8% in 1999.

69 The Government encourages family-friendly initiatives to help women. Tax incentives such as the Working Mother's Child Relief are designed to encourage women to enter the workforce. There are also programmes such as *Flexi-Works!*, which provides incentives to employers to recruit the economically inactive into flexible work arrangements; the “30 Minutes to Work” programme, which matches non-working women with jobs close to their homes; and “Step Out for Change” programme, which helps economically inactive women build their confidence and learn more about the job market.

70 In August 2008, the Government unveiled an enhanced Marriage & Parenthood package. It provided for longer paid maternity leave and childcare leave for both parents, and financial support for parents to raise and care for their children. Women in Singapore are entitled to four months' paid maternity leave as long as they fulfil certain eligibility criteria. Employers who terminate the services of women on maternity leave can be fined up to S\$5,000 and/or jailed for up to 6 months.

71 Aside from granting women equal access to healthcare resources, the Government also pays special attention to women's healthcare needs. As a result, the life expectancy at birth of women increased from 80.4 years in 2001 to 83.7 years in 2009; while Singapore's maternal mortality rate was zero in 2009, down from 8 per 100,000 live and still-births in 2007, and among the lowest in the world.

72 Female representation in Parliament has been increasing. Women now constitute 23.4% of Members of Parliament,<sup>14</sup> up from 12% in 2004. On 1 April 2009, Mrs Lim Hwee Hua became the first female Minister in Singapore.

73 ~~We have put in place laws to address domestic violence. The Women's Charter was amended in 1996 to give greater protection to family~~

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<sup>14</sup> Based on data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as of 31 May 2009, Singapore was ranked 39<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries in terms of the percentage of women in the Lower or Single House. The percentage of women in the Singapore Parliament currently exceeds IPU's world average of 18.4%.

members against domestic violence. The amendments included expanding the definition of family violence to include emotional and psychological abuse.

74 To protect minors and women, Singapore has enacted robust laws against Trafficking in Persons (TIP). These include specific provisions in the Penal Code, Children and Young Persons Act, and the Women's Charter. The law also empowers the Singapore Police Force to act against offenders who operate overseas. These laws cover all acts leading up to the commission of the primary offence in Singapore, even if such acts were committed overseas.

75 Police investigations of TIP cases are handled by a dedicated unit of specially trained officers. Singapore has also established a network of support and assistance for the victims of trafficking. Such services are provided by the Government and non-government agencies to all victims regardless of nationality.

76 The Government has made significant strides forward in the advancement of women in Singapore. We will continue to provide an enabling environment for women and explore ways to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. More details on the status of women in Singapore are available in Singapore's Fourth Periodic CEDAW Report at "[http://app.mcys.gov.sg/WEB/faml\\_enablewomen\\_cedaw.asp](http://app.mcys.gov.sg/WEB/faml_enablewomen_cedaw.asp)".

## **2. Children**

77 The Government considers the welfare of children as a shared responsibility among the different stakeholders – government agencies, voluntary welfare organisations, the community and the family. This 'Many Helping Hands' approach allows all stakeholders to take collective ownership of children's issues. Singapore sees the family as the foundation safeguarding a child's welfare. An inter-ministry committee was formed in 2009 to identify help for dysfunctional families. The National Family Council, which comprises public and people sector representatives, also seeks to promote resilient families.

78 Singapore provides all children with quality healthcare. These include health screening in schools, childhood immunisation programme, promoting adolescent health, particularly mental health, obesity, smoking, alcohol consumption and sexual health.

79 Singapore provides all its children with educational opportunities. Aside from mandating primary school education, Singapore makes education



affordable through subsidies and financial assistance. Singapore has also taken steps to improve the quality of early childhood education.

80 Singapore provides support for the education of children from low-wage families. The Ministry of Education's Financial Assistance Scheme provides needy students with fee waivers, free textbooks and school attire, and bursaries. The Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme and Centre-Based Financial Assistance for Childcare provide fee subsidies to low-income Singaporean families to support their children's pre-school education and childcare. Singapore's pre-school participation rate is among the highest in the world. As of October 2010, 98.8% of pre-school aged children in Singapore attend pre-school. The Healthy Start Programme provides intensive intervention services for young children and their parents from at-risk families.

81 Singapore has a robust child protection framework, comprising relevant legislation in the Children and Young Persons Act, the Women's Charter, the Penal Code, the Films Act and the Undesirable Publications Act, which criminalises the sale of child pornography.

82 Any child in Singapore who is a victim of exploitation is extended protection and assistance, regardless of nationality. Community partners, law enforcement officers, teachers and school counsellors are trained to detect and manage child abuse cases. The National Family Violence Networking System, which links the Police, hospitals, social service agencies, the Courts and Ministries, ensures that assistance is timely and help is within reach.

83 The judicial system in Singapore is sensitive to the needs of children. Apart from a separate justice system for children who come into conflict with the law, a Children Care Court, established in May 2008, oversees proceedings pertaining to the care and protection of children. In 2008, the Family Court introduced a less adversarial approach in hearing custody cases through the CHILD Programme.<sup>15</sup> The Court directs litigation in such a way that the focus is on the child's best interests.

84 To better fulfil its obligations under the CRC and other international conventions, Singapore has amended the Singapore Constitution and several pieces of legislation. The Penal Code<sup>16</sup> was amended in 2007 to extend extra-territorial jurisdiction over Singaporeans who sexually exploit minors

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<sup>15</sup> More information on the CHILD Programme can be found at "<http://app.subcourts.gov.sg/family/page.aspx?pageid=45944>".

<sup>16</sup> The penal code can be found at "[http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_getdata.pl?actno=2008-REVVED-224&doctitle=PENAL%20CODE%0a&date=latest&method=part&segid=1228207124-002776#1228207125-003561](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_getdata.pl?actno=2008-REVVED-224&doctitle=PENAL%20CODE%0a&date=latest&method=part&segid=1228207124-002776#1228207125-003561)".

overseas, and to prevent child sex tourism. The Employment Act<sup>17</sup> was amended in 2004 to raise the minimum working age for children and young persons from 14 to 15 in line with the ILO Minimum Age Convention. The minimum age in exceptional cases to work in light work was also raised from 12 to 13.

85 Singapore supports international and regional platforms on child welfare. In November 2008, Singapore adopted the Rio de Janeiro Pact to Prevent and Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. Singapore passed the International Child Abduction Act in September 2010 to operationalise the HCCAICA, providing an avenue for expeditious and transparent resolution of trans-border custodial disputes. This is in line with Singapore's commitment to protecting the best interests of children.

86 Singapore is a member of the Child Wise Regional Taskforce, which looks at responses within ASEAN to child sex tourism issues. Singapore is also part of the Regional Education Campaign against Child Sex Tourism, together with ASEAN member-states and Australia.

87 More details on Singapore's progress in ensuring the welfare of its children can be found in Singapore's Initial Report and the combined Second and Third Periodic Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child at "[http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/indv\\_uncrc.asp](http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/indv_uncrc.asp)".

### **3. Persons With Disabilities**

88 In September 2006, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and the National Council of Social Service appointed an Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee to review and chart services for persons with disabilities. The Committee issued its report in February 2007.

89 Singapore's vision is to be an inclusive society where persons with disabilities are given the opportunity to become equal, integral and contributing members of the society. Families will be the first line of support and institutionalisation will remain the last resort. Singapore's focus is on implementing the recommendations of the Enabling Masterplan 2007-11<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The Employment Act can be found at "[http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-91](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-91)".

<sup>18</sup> The Enabling Masterplan 2007-11 charts the development of programmes and services in the disability sector from 2007 - 2011. It encompasses concrete and comprehensive recommendations to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in Singapore. More information can be found at "<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/Publications/EnablingMasterplan20072011.aspx>".

Singapore is also actively studying the provisions in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

90 Public housing in Singapore is built to accommodate the needs of different segments of the population, including the disabled and the aged. Since 2006, all public flats have been built with Universal Design features, such as wheelchair-accessible toilets, switches and sockets. By 2011, all public housing estates will be barrier-free, facilitating wheelchair access to public areas. Private sector building owners can tap on the Building and Construction Authority's S\$40 million Accessibility Fund to upgrade their buildings.

91 To safeguard the interests of persons with mental incapacity, the Government passed the Mental Capacity Act in September 2008. The Act provides a comprehensive legal framework to enable and support persons who lack mental capacity and to provide safeguards for them. The Special Needs Trust Company was set up in October 2009 to help persons with disabilities have access to non-profit trust services. In March 2010, the Government launched a Special Needs Savings Scheme where parents of persons with disabilities can use the savings in their CPF account to provide a stream of income to their children upon their demise.

92 The Centre for Enabled Living, set up in 2009, serves as an information and referral centre for eldercare and disability services. It offers financial and legal advisory workshops to parents and persons with disabilities, and advises them on available schemes and options.

#### **4. The Aged**

93 Singapore's population is ageing. By 2020, 35% of the population will be aged 50 and over, compared to 25% in 2007. The UN Population Division projects that the median age in Singapore will be 54 years in 2050, up from 38 years in 2005. This would make Singapore's population the fourth oldest in the world.

94 Singapore is addressing the needs of an ageing population. Studio apartments equipped with elderly-friendly fittings such as lever taps and emergency pull-cords have been introduced. The Government has also embarked on a S\$5.5 billion project to retrofit older public housing blocks with lifts that stop at every floor.

95 With rising life expectancies, people will want to work longer. A Tripartite Committee on Employability of Older Workers (Tricom) was formed in 2005 to study the issue. Tricom's recommendations in 2007 included (i) expanding unemployment opportunities for older workers; (ii) enhancing their cost competitiveness; (iii) raising their skills; and (iv) improving perceptions of older workers. Specific initiatives included the introduction of the *ADVANTAGE!* Scheme<sup>19</sup> to encourage and help employers recruit, re-employ and retain older workers.

96 One of Tricom's key recommendations was to introduce re-employment legislation to allow older workers to work longer and save more for retirement. Under the recently amended Retirement and Re-employment Act, employers will be obliged to offer re-employment to workers aged 62 from 2012, so long as they are fit and have displayed satisfactory performance, till they are 65.

## 5. Migrant Workers

97 The Government works closely with industry and other partners to ensure that foreign workers are treated fairly. Foreign workers play an important role in Singapore's economy. As of December 2009, there were 1.05 million foreign workers in Singapore, about a third of the workforce.

98 Our small size places constraints on the number of people Singapore can accommodate. We thus carefully manage the inflow and stay of low-skilled and unskilled foreign workers. The Ministerial Steering Committee on Foreign Worker Management was established in 2009 to look into and provide for the needs of foreign workers, from housing to recreation. The Government has also put in place a set of legislative, administrative and educational measures to protect the well-being of all foreign workers.

99 Legislation: Foreign workers are given the same protections as locals under the Employment Act. The Act covers basic terms and conditions of employment such as maximum working hours, overtime payments, authorised salary deductions and frequency of salary payments. The Employment Act does not cover domestic workers (both local and foreign) as the nature of domestic work makes it impractical to regulate specific aspects of such work as prescribed under the Act. Instead, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) are governed and protected under a specific Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA).

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<sup>19</sup> Information on the Advantage! Scheme can be found at "<http://www.ntuc.org.sg/advantage/>".

100 The EFMA allows the Government to impose additional requirements on employers of lower-skilled foreign workers<sup>20</sup> to ensure their well-being. These requirements include proper housing,<sup>21</sup> prompt payments and adequate food and rest. Employers must also purchase and maintain medical insurance for both foreign workers and FDWs. From 2010, Singapore raised the minimum medical insurance coverage to S\$15,000 a year, which will cover 98% of hospital bills incurred. Employers are also required to purchase personal accident insurance for FDWs with a minimum coverage of S\$40,000. The EFMA makes it an offence for employers to receive payment from a foreign worker or an employment agent as consideration for employing the worker. It is also an offence for employers to recover employment-related expenses, such as the foreign worker levy or security bond, from the worker. Employers who flout the law can be fined up to S\$5,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 6 months.

101 Employers of foreign work permit holders<sup>22</sup> have to put up a security bond to ensure that they comply with the requirements under the EFMA. The security bond also ensures that upon the completion or termination of the employment contract, employers repatriate their workers at no cost to the workers.

102 Singapore regulates the practices of employment agencies (EAs) serving as intermediaries between employers and foreign workers under the Employment Agencies Act. The EA Act requires Singaporean agencies to be licensed and to comply with minimum standards. It also caps fees that they can collect from foreign workers. In 2009, 6 EAs and unlicensed EAs were prosecuted and convicted for offences such as illegal employment, passport withholding and performing EA activities without a valid license. They were fined between S\$1,400 and S\$3,000. 11 EAs had their licences revoked and their security deposit of between S\$10,000 to S\$20,000 forfeited.

103 Singapore has recently amended the EA Act to raise the standard of recruitment practices in Singapore and deter malpractices associated with unlicensed EA activity. The changes include mandatory certification and registration for all EA personnel, enhancing the maximum penalty for operating an unlicensed EA, and penalising employers who engage unlicensed EAs.

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<sup>20</sup> Work Permit and S Pass holders.

<sup>21</sup> In the tenders for new dormitories for foreign workers, the Government is looking at the provision of social and recreational facilities so foreign workers can relax, and socialise.

<sup>22</sup> Excluding Malaysian Work Permit holders.

104 Administrative measures: The Government has introduced various measures in recent years to provide foreign workers with more information on their rights. An In-Principle Approval letter is sent to workers prior to their departure for employment in Singapore to inform them, among other things, of their basic monthly salary. Employment agencies must facilitate the use of a standard employment contract between FDWs and their employers. This contract must specify salary, rest hours, notice period for termination, and rest days or compensation in lieu of rest days.<sup>23</sup>

105 Monitoring/Enforcement: Foreign workers in distress or who have disputes with their employers can approach the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) for assistance. In addition, the Government carries out regular inspections and audits to ensure employers comply with their obligations to foreign workers. Inspections of foreign worker housing are conducted to ensure that they comply with safety and land use regulations, and provide adequate facilities. Audits are also conducted to ensure that workers are paid. Errant employers are not only prosecuted, but may also be barred from employing foreign workers again. A total of 476 employers were prosecuted and convicted for breaches of the EFMA in 2009 for different types of offences such as illegal employment, illegal deployment, collection of kickbacks and bringing in foreign workers without jobs for them. Depending on the severity of the offence, the offenders were fined between S\$900 and S\$67,200 and/or jailed between 2 and 147 weeks. In 2009, 4 employers were prosecuted for salary arrears to foreign workers under the Employment Act. The range of fines imposed on these employers was between S\$1,000 to S\$20,300 (for 1 count and 25 counts respectively).<sup>24</sup>

106 FDWs working in Singapore for the first time are randomly selected for interviews by the Government. Officers will ask questions to determine if they are adjusting well to life in Singapore, as well as to detect any employer malpractice. The Government monitors and interviews employers who frequently change FDWs. If they cannot offer satisfactory reasons for their behaviour, they are barred from employing new workers.

107 Education/Promotion: The Government takes pains to educate all foreign workers, in their native languages, of their rights and responsibilities and avenues for assistance, such as Embassies, voluntary welfare

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<sup>23</sup> Employers who do not grant foreign domestic workers rest days in accordance with the contract, or provide adequate rest, would be in breach of our Work Permit conditions and can be fined up to S\$5,000 and/or jailed up to six months.

<sup>24</sup> Under the Employment Act, charges are brought based on the frequency of the offence is committed. This differs from the EFMA, under which charges are brought based on the number of foreign workers affected.

organisations, the Police and helplines run by MOM, including one specifically for FDWs.

108 All first-time FDWs are required to attend a compulsory safety-awareness course conducted in their own languages. All first-time employers of FDWs must attend an Employers' Orientation Programme on their roles and responsibilities.

109 Social partners: MOM works closely with various partners – including unions, NGOs, the media and foreign embassies – to promote the welfare of foreign workers. In April 2009, the Government supported the creation of a Migrant Workers Centre by the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation. This Centre plays an important role in looking after the welfare of foreign workers.

## **C. Political and Civil Liberties**

110 Singapore's diverse society poses a challenge in balancing social harmony with the preservation of individual rights. As recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, individual rights must be subject to legal limits in order to protect the rights of others, as well as to maintain public order and general welfare.

### **1. Political Associations**

111 Politicians, from all parties, as well as civil society activists, are free to organise and pursue their political goals. Vigorous political debates are often carried out against the Government – in Parliament, at public forums, in publications and on the Internet. No person has ever been detained for engaging in lawful political activities.

112 Singaporeans are free to set up societies and associations. There were 7,100 registered societies in 2009, compared to 3,900 in 1988 and 5,300 in 1999. While Singaporeans are free to establish such groups, there are certain restrictions in the Societies Act to ensure that groups intended for unlawful purposes, or pose a threat to public order and welfare, are not established. This restriction is used sparingly. In 2007-2009, only 5 out of 886 applications for registration were rejected.

## **2. Due Process and Fair Trial**

113 Article 9(1) of the Singapore Constitution provides that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty “save in accordance with law”. Parties are given the right to a fair trial where they are free to engage counsel to represent them. Statements are recorded in accordance with procedures prescribed by law. The accused may challenge any statement taken from him. If the statement is showed to have been recorded under threat, inducement, or promise, it will not be admitted in court.

114 The Constitution guarantees the independence of the Singapore judiciary. Magistrates and district judges in the Singapore Subordinate Courts are not members of the Executive. They are judicial officers, accountable only to the Legal Service Commission, which is headed by the Chief Justice and Attorney-General. The Chief Justice, Attorney-General and Supreme Court Justices all enjoy security of tenure.

115 The Legal Aid Bureau was set up to ensure that those with limited means have adequate access to civil justice.

116 All persons facing a capital charge in the High Court are assured of legal representation. In cases where an accused person does not appoint a counsel, the State assigns one to him free of charge.<sup>25</sup>

117 The Subordinate Courts have set up Helping to Empower Litigants-in-Person Centres to help those who are not represented by lawyers find out more about court processes and procedures.

118 The use of alternative dispute resolution facilities has increased steadily in Singapore. Singapore promotes the resolution of disputes through mediation, which provides an informal and amicable way of settling interpersonal, social and community disputes. Community Mediation Centres have been set up to provide such mediation services.

## **3. Criminal Justice**

119 Singapore believes that it is a fundamental human right of all our citizens to live in a safe environment, free from drugs, guns, random street violence and terrorism. Our laws are designed to protect the public against

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<sup>25</sup> For accused persons facing non-capital charges and who are unable to pay for legal counsel, they may apply for legal representation under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme administered by the Law Society of Singapore.



crimes, while ensuring that persons accused of alleged crimes have due process and fair trials. Singapore's crime rate is one of the lowest – 684 per 100,000 population in 2008, with 111 violent crimes per 100,000 population – despite a relatively small police force.

120 Singapore considers capital punishment as a criminal justice issue, rather than a human rights issue, that remains legal under international law. Capital punishment is imposed only for the most serious crimes. It sends a strong signal to would-be offenders, deterring them from committing crimes such as murder and offences involving firearms. In the case of drug trafficking, the death penalty has deterred major drug syndicates from establishing themselves in Singapore.

121 The Constitution provides that no person shall be detained for more than 48 hours without the authority of a Magistrate. The Courts must inquire into any complaint that a person is being unlawfully detained. The wrongful confinement of a person is an offence punishable by fine and imprisonment under the Penal Code.

122 It is also an offence under the Penal Code for anyone to cause hurt to or wrongfully confine a person for the purpose of extorting a confession or any information, which may lead to the detection of an offence.

123 Under the Criminal Procedure Code, an accused person has the right to have notice of the charges against him. The prosecution bears the burden of proving its case beyond reasonable doubt. The accused has the right to cross-examine prosecution witnesses, and to defend himself by giving evidence on his own behalf and calling other witnesses in his defence.

124 In May 2010, Parliament passed the Criminal Procedure Code<sup>26</sup> (Amendment) Bill, which has provisions to enhance the rights of accused persons by structuring and formalising the pre-trial discovery of the evidence to be used at trial. The range of sentencing options available to the judiciary was also widened through the introduction of a spectrum of community-based sentences, including mandatory treatment orders, community work orders, community service orders and day reporting orders. The new Criminal Procedure Code 2010 is expected to come into force some time in 2011.

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<sup>26</sup> The Criminal Procedure Code 2010 can be found at "[http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_legdisp.pl?actno=2010-ACT-15-N&doctitle=CRIMINAL%20PROCEDURE%20CODE%20ACT%202010%0A&date=latest&method=part&sl=1](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_legdisp.pl?actno=2010-ACT-15-N&doctitle=CRIMINAL%20PROCEDURE%20CODE%20ACT%202010%0A&date=latest&method=part&sl=1)".

125 Singapore believes strongly in the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. The Singapore Prison Service has a comprehensive rehabilitation process for all inmates to prevent offenders from re-offending. Through a combination of rehabilitation, skills development and aftercare, we have achieved notable success in bringing down the recidivism rate from 44.4% in 2000 (for the 1998 release cohort) to 25.1% in 2008<sup>27</sup> (for the 2006 release cohort).

#### **4. Preventive Detention**

126 Preventive detention without trial is permitted as a last resort under the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act (CLTPA) and the Internal Security Act (ISA) to counter serious threats against public or national security. The need to protect witnesses and informants from intimidation is one of the reasons for preventive detention. In these cases, the character of the detainees' clandestine activities is such that the disclosure of the intelligence collected as evidence against them will endanger the sources of information. In addition, given Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious make-up, an open trial for cases involving racial and religious agitation or incitement would provide defendants and their supporters further opportunity for inflammatory rabble-rousing.

127 The CLTPA is used against persons involved in secret society, drug trafficking, loan sharking and other serious organised criminal activities, against whom witnesses may be unwilling to testify in an open court for fear of reprisal. The CLTPA has proven an effective tool in suppressing such crimes. In the case of drug offences for instance, the CLTPA is an important tool used against transnational and local organised drug syndicates. Despite the ready supply of drugs from the region, the number of local drug abusers arrested has been decreasing over the last decade - from 3,157 arrests in 2000 to 1,883 in 2009. Today, Singapore has one of the lowest drug prevalence rates in the world.

128 In Singapore, the ISA is used to pre-emptively neutralise threats to national security such as racial and religious extremists, espionage and subversion. The ISA has proven particularly effective in addressing the threat of terrorism. For example, members of the Singapore branch of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a regional terrorist organisation, were arrested under the ISA in December 2001. The arrests thwarted terrorist attacks planned against

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<sup>27</sup> Recidivism, defined as the percentage of every cohort released who re-offend and return to prison, is a key performance indicator. The Singapore Prison Service uses a 2-year rate, and has been tracking it since 1998.

foreign establishments in Singapore. Sustained operations against the JI network, and the detention of many of its members under the ISA, have effectively neutralised the group in Singapore. Governments around the world increasingly recognise the need for preventive powers within a comprehensive institutionalised legal framework to deal effectively with terrorism and all forms of violent extremism.

129 Detentions under the CLTPA and ISA are governed by laws that provide a framework of checks and balances mirroring those of normal arrests<sup>28</sup>. All detainees must be informed of the grounds of their detention and may challenge the detention with the aid of legal counsel before independent bodies comprising prominent private citizens and – in the case of ISA detentions – a Supreme Court judge.<sup>29</sup> Detainees are not held in secret, and the detention orders must be reviewed regularly. The final decision as to whether a person should be detained rests with the President. Detainees are treated humanely. They are allowed to have regular family visits. Independent Boards consisting of over 50 Justices of the Peace and community leaders make unannounced visits to the places of detention to ensure there is no ill-treatment of detainees.

130 Since December 2001, over 50 persons have been held in preventive detention for involvement in terrorism-related activities. As of 1 December 2010, 15 of them remained in detention. The ISA is not punitive but preventive. Terrorist detainees who have been assessed to be rehabilitated have been released.

## **5. Racial and Religious Harmony**

131 Singapore considers it a national priority to combat discrimination on the grounds of race or religion. The core principles of meritocracy, secular government and multiracialism ensure that the Government adopts an even-handed approach to all communities.

132 Meritocracy: All Singaporeans can progress and be rewarded on the basis of their individual merit, and no one is disadvantaged on the basis of race, language, religion or gender.

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<sup>28</sup> The CLTPA must also be renewed by Parliament every 5 years. This provides a mechanism for the powers of preventive detention under the CLTPA to be deactivated.

<sup>29</sup> For ISA cases, the members of the body are appointed by the President in consultation with the Chief Justice of Singapore. For CLTPA cases, they are appointed by the Minister for Home Affairs

133 Secular government: Government policy decisions are independent from religious objectives, and the state is neutral towards all religious beliefs.

134 Multiracialism: Every ethnic community is free to preserve and promote its own cultural heritage, without infringing on the rights and sensitivities of other groups. The aim is to enlarge the common space where all Singaporeans live, work and play, and strengthen our national identity.

135 Singapore has in place a strong legal framework consisting of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, the Penal Code, the Sedition Act, and the Public Order Act to act as a deterrent against any group attempting to cause racial and religious conflict. The Presidential Council for Minority Rights considers and reports on such matters affecting persons of any racial or religious community in Singapore as may be referred to it by Parliament or the Government. With limited exceptions,<sup>30</sup> the Council scrutinises draft legislation to ensure they do not disadvantage any racial or religious community. The Council also scrutinises subsidiary legislation for the same purpose.

136 Article 153 of the Constitution states that “The Legislation shall by law make provision for regulating Muslim religious affairs and for constituting a Council to advise the President in matters relating to the Muslim religion”, providing the constitutional basis for the AMLA. There is a Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. The Singapore Government consults the MUIS as well as the advisory boards<sup>31</sup> of other religions on matters relating to the respective religious communities.

137 Administrative measures complement legislation to create a conducive environment to encourage social harmony. For instance, to prevent the formation of racial enclaves, the Ethnic Integration Policy ensures a balanced mix of the major ethnic communities in public housing estates.

138 Under the Community Engagement Programme launched in 2006, the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Racial and Religious Harmony provides a platform for ethnic, religious, community and government leaders to engage with each other, build networks of trust, and formulate strategies to strengthen community interactions. The NSC also provides direction to the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles to nurture similar networks of trust at the local level.

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<sup>30</sup> The exceptions to this are certified Money Bills, urgent Bills and Bills affecting the defence and security of Singapore or that which relate to public safety, peace or good order in Singapore.

<sup>31</sup> This includes the Sikh Advisory Board, Hindu Advisory Board and Hindu Endowments Board.

139 A variety of civic initiatives have also helped to promote racial and religious harmony. For example, major religious groups promulgated the Declaration on Religious Harmony in 2003, as an affirmation of their commitment to maintain religious harmony in Singapore.

140 Our vigilance and robust legal framework has allowed Singapore to remain free from any serious sectarian conflict for more than 40 years.

## **6. Assembly**

141 Article 14, paragraph 1(b) of the Singapore Constitution provides that “every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of expression”. Under article 14, paragraph 2(b), Parliament may by law impose on this right such restrictions as it considers necessary in the interest of national security or public order. Singapore’s small size, high population density and diversity mean that actions or speech by one group of people could potentially have an impact on other groups. Given this, it is vital that individual rights and freedoms be exercised responsibly within a legal framework.

142 Generally, all assemblies held indoors do not require Police permits, unless they relate to the sensitive issues of race and religion and/or involve foreign organisers and participants.

143 With the exception of the Speakers' Corner, assemblies held outdoors generally require a Police permit due to their higher potential for disruption. No permit is required for any assembly at Speakers’ Corner so long as the organisers of and participants in events at the venue are Singapore citizens and the activities do not touch upon race and religion issues.

144 For activities that do not fulfil the exemption criteria, applications can be made for a Police permit. The Police will assess each application based on considerations of public safety and security. A permit may be refused if the assembly may potentially occasion public disorder or damage to property, cause communal hostility, or glorify or instigate terrorism or the commission of an offence.

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## **7. Expression and Information**

145 Article 14, paragraph 1(a) of the Constitution states that “every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression” Under article 14, paragraph 2(b), Parliament may by law impose on this right such

restrictions as it considers necessary in the interest of national security, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality. It may also impose restrictions to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence.

146 Singaporeans are free to express their views on the Government and indeed on any matter – so long as they do so in a way that is in accordance with the law. They do so in newspaper forums, publications, online discussion forums and social networking platforms, consultation dialogues and feedback programmes. Political parties have their own party websites and publications.

147 A 2005-06 Gallup survey showed that 7 in 10 citizens had confidence in Singapore's media.<sup>32</sup> The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer found that 68% of the Singapore population trusted the articles they read in the newspapers as credible sources of information, the highest among developed countries in Asia, the Americas and Europe. Singapore subscribes to the principle of a free and responsible press that reports the news accurately and objectively. Our local media plays a constructive role in nation-building while reflecting diverse views. We encourage the free flow of information, but not an irresponsible press that undermines social cohesion.

148 Our media regulations are not meant to stifle the free flow of information, but to prevent local newspapers from being manipulated to subvert social cohesion. This has happened in the past. The regulations have not prevented the free flow of information. There are over 5,500 foreign newspapers and periodicals circulating in Singapore. In addition, Singaporeans have access to a wide variety of foreign television and radio channels. There are 135 journalists from 67 foreign media organisations and 18 satellite broadcasters in Singapore.

149 Our media laws relating to the foreign media are not meant to restrict their reporting, but to ensure a responsible press. The foreign media is free to report on Singapore. But if their reports are inaccurate, the Singapore Government must have the right of reply. We do not accept that the press should be free to defame persons, nor do we accept that the press should be free to denigrate any race or religion.

150 Singaporeans enjoy a wide range of films and videos. Over the years, more diverse content has been made available with the introduction of a classification system. In 2010, the Government accepted most of the

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<sup>32</sup> "Quality and Integrity of World's Media Questioned" by Gallup. The results of the survey can be found at "<http://www.gallup.com/poll/103300/Quality-Integrity-Worlds-Media-Questioned.aspx>".

recommendations made by the Censorship Review Committee, an independent body comprising a cross-section of the society, and further liberalised content regulation. As in other countries, the intent of our content regulation is to protect the vulnerable, especially the young, from offensive or undesirable materials.

151 Where the Internet is concerned, Singapore is among the most connected countries in the region. Singapore's household broadband penetration rate is 175.6% (as of August 2010). The Government is rolling out the ultra-high speed Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network, which will greatly increase broadband capacity and speed.

152 No registration is required for most Internet Content Providers (ICPs). Registration is only required for ICPs whose sites engage in the propagation, promotion or discussions of political or religious issues relating to Singapore. This does not mean that political or religious content is not allowed. Registration merely serves to emphasise the need for content providers to be responsible for what they put up on their websites. Over the last 14 years, only a small handful of ICPs have been asked to register as political websites.<sup>33</sup>

153 Political postings on the Internet are prevalent, including many that are highly critical of the Government. No blogger or other online publisher has been prosecuted for such postings.<sup>34</sup>

154 The Government has restricted access to 100 websites as a symbolic statement of our social values.<sup>35</sup> These sites carry pornographic and other offensive content.

## **V. Future Directions in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights**

155 Singapore will build on its achievements in human rights even as it addresses the challenges listed in this report. Preserving racial and religious harmony will remain an absolute priority, but our laws will evolve to meet the changing political, economic and social aspirations of Singaporeans.

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<sup>33</sup> Registration does not come with any additional conditions. Registrants would simply need to observe the same set of Class Licence conditions and Internet Code of Practice as any other non-registered ICPs.

<sup>34</sup> Some bloggers have been prosecuted under the Sedition Act, but this was for making virulently racist and anti-Muslim comments online.

<sup>35</sup> The foreign OpenNet Initiative (ONI) survey in 2007 found that Singapore has low levels of filtering, preferring to apply a "light-touch" regulatory framework to the Internet, promoting responsible use while giving industry players "maximum flexibility".

156 In terms of political expression, the Government has in recent years eased restrictions on political films and Internet election advertising, and has allowed party political films that are factual and objective.

157 In terms of economic and social policies, the Government remains committed to helping the poor access education, healthcare and housing. We will improve our protection of special groups, including the disabled and the aged.

158 We are considering the feasibility of accession to several international human rights treaties, including:

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- The International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.
- The ILO Maritime Labour Convention and Convention on Abolition of Forced Labour.

159 Singapore welcomes this UPR process as a conversation with our citizens, civil society organisations and fellow UN Member States on our achievements and challenges in the area of human rights. Singapore has been successful in improving the lives of her citizens, and reiterates her commitment to human rights in her continuing efforts to advance the lives and well-being of her citizenry.