



Universal Periodic Review (The Third Cycle)- Stakeholders' Report to the UN, 2020

Submitted by: MARUAH - Singapore Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism

Date of Establishment: 2007

About: MARUAH means Dignity in Malay, Singapore's national language. MARUAH was registered as a Political Association in 2010. Its work on human rights are based on four pillars: advocacy, research, capacity building and in solidarity. MARUAH has consultative status with ECOSOC and with ASEAN's AICHR.

MARUAH is the Singapore focal point for the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism. The Working Group has national representatives from all of the founding Member States of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The Working Group is an NGO officially recognised in the ASEAN Charter as a stakeholder in ASEAN. Read more about MARUAH [here](#)

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Executive Summary

MARUAH is submitting our Stakeholder's Report for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review focusing on civil and political rights - Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, the Electoral system, Justice, and Discrimination. We also submit recommendations in each section based on the SMART framework and draw upon the recommendations made by Human Rights Council to Singapore, our mid-term UPR report (2018), and the past UPRs we have submitted in 2011 and 2015.¹

Lack of ratification of international human rights conventions

1. While Singapore has ratified several key human rights treaties such as CEDAW, CRC, CRPD and ICERD, it has entered reservations to significant articles of CEDAW and ICERD.² Singapore has also not acceded to many other human rights conventions³. Much more effort needs to be undertaken by the government to institutionalise obligations to respect and protect human rights, while refraining from actions that hinder their protection.

Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association

2. Defamation remains a criminal offence under the Penal Code in Singapore⁴ despite the recommendation of the UN Human Rights Council that States should not treat defamation as a criminal offence.⁵ Government Ministers in Singapore have also frequently filed civil suits for defamation against their critics⁶. In addition, the Government recently enacted the Prevention of Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) which is ostensibly aimed at "fake news" but lacks safeguards against abuse by the Government.
3. In October 2018, online media site *The Online Citizen (TOC)* was forced to shut down temporarily following the seizure of its computers by police who were investigating a complaint of criminal defamation filed by a Government agency, the

¹ MARUAH supports the combined UPR stakeholder report on rights of migrant workers submitted by Humanitarian Organisation on Migration Economics and Transient Workers Count Too.

² *Summary of Stakeholders' Information* (pp. 1-14, Rep. No. A/HRC/WG.6/24/SGP/3). (2011). Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review; Association of Women Action and Research CEDAW Shadow Report (pp. 1-275, Rep.). (2011). Singapore: AWARE; Report on CEDAW and the Republic of Singapore "Many Voices, One Movement" Coalition Report of National NGOs (pp. 1-38, Rep.). (2017). Singapore.

³ These are most notably: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

⁴ Chapter XXI, Penal Code (<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PC1871?ProvIds=pr499-,pr500-,pr501-,pr502->)

⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, A/HRC/14/23, UN Human Rights Council (20 April 2010), para 120.

⁶ Summary of stakeholder's information prepared for second cycle of Singapore UPR, 2016, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/252/06/PDF/G1525206.pdf>

Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)⁷. The editor of TOC, Terry Xu, was later charged with criminal defamation for publishing a letter accusing the cabinet of corruption, even though TOC had removed the letter on the same day that it received an order from IMDA to do so.

4. Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong has also filed a civil lawsuit for defamation against Xu for publishing articles that referred to allegations made by the PM's siblings⁸ even though the PM chose not to sue his siblings as he did not wish to "further besmirch his parents' names"⁹. Another online commentator, Leong Sze Hian has also been sued by the PM for sharing *without comment* a link to an article that appeared on another website¹⁰. [Disclosure: Leong previously served as MARUAH's President, 2017-2018].
5. In the same vein, a 2017 Facebook private post from Mr Li Shengwu, grandson of Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, that the Singapore Government was "very litigious" and has a "pliant court system" in relation to the 38 Oxley Road dispute¹¹, was fined \$15,000 for contempt of court¹². Civil activist Jolovan Wham and opposition politician John Tan Joo Liang were each fined \$5,000 on 29 April 2019 for scandalising the judiciary. The former for making a Facebook post on 27 April 2018 stating that Singapore's courts are not as independent as Malaysia's on cases with political implications, and the latter for criticising the Attorney-General for starting contempt proceedings against Mr Wham¹³.
6. On October 3, 2018, Singapore's State Court convicted Mr Seelan Palay for "staging an unlawful performance without a permit" ¹⁴under Section 7 of the Public Order Act, and sentenced him with a \$2500 fine. He refused to pay his fine and was ordered to serve a two-week prison term. Mr Palay's offence on October 1 2017 was to display a mirror outside Parliament House, as a reflection on the extensive without trial incarceration of Mr Chia Thye Poh.¹⁵ He did this alone, without any permit.

⁷ Lim, Adrian, "The Online Citizen to resume publication after obtaining new hardware, says editor", The Straits Times, 26 Nov 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/the-online-citizen-to-resume-publication-after-obtaining-new-hardware-says-editor>. Accessed 10 Oct 2020.

⁸Sim, R. (2019, September 10). PM Lee Hsien Loong will testify in court if defamation suit against TOC editor goes to trial. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/pm-lee-hsien-loong-will-testify-in-court-if-defamation-suit-against-toc-editor-goes-to> Accessed 1 Aug 2020.

⁹Sim, R. (2019, September 10). PM Lee Hsien Loong will testify in court if defamation suit against TOC editor goes to trial. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/pm-lee-hsien-loong-will-testify-in-court-if-defamation-suit-against-toc-editor-goes-to> Accessed 1 Aug 2020.

¹⁰ Asia Sentinel, 2018, Dec 7. Singapore Steps Up Drumbeat of Charges Against Critics. Retrieved from: <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/singapore-charges-leong-sze-hian>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

¹¹ Tang Louisa (2020, July 29) Li Shengwu fined S\$15,000 for scandalising judiciary in 2017 Facebook post. Retrieved from: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/li-shengwu-fined-s15000-scandalising-judiciary-2017-facebook-post>. Accessed 12 September 2020

¹² Wong Shiyong (2020, August 11) Li Shengwu does not admit guilt but will pay \$15,000 fine for contempt of court. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/li-shengwu-does-not-admit-guilt-but-will-pay-fine-for-contempt-of-court>. Accessed 12 September 2020

¹³ Lum, Selina (2019, April 29) \$5,000 fine each for activist Jolovan Wham and SDP's John Tan for contempt of court. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/5000-fine-each-for-activist-jolovan-wham-and-sdps-john-tan-for-contempt-of-court>. Accessed 12 September 2020

¹⁴ OMCT (2018, October 9) Singapore: Sentencing and arbitrary detention of Mr. Seelan Palay. Retrieved from: <https://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/singapore/2018/10/d25066/>. Accessed 10 September 2020

¹⁵ Chua, Alvin, (2013, May 16), Chia Thye Poh, Retrieved from: https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-05-22_180815.html. Accessed 13 October 2020.

Censorship

7. A programme titled “Dissent and Resistance in Singapore” slated programme at Yale-NUS College (Yale-NUS), was abruptly cancelled in September 2019.¹⁶ The formal reasons were given as “administrative errors” over not making a legal risk assessment of the programme proposal.¹⁷ Notably, Yale-NUS’ Policies and Procedures on Free Speech and Non-Discrimination states it is ‘firmly committed to the free expression of ideas in all forms...there are no questions that cannot be asked, no answers that cannot be discussed and debated’. Yet the College also “ask(s) that you (students) be mindful of the local Singaporean context”. It is this “local Singaporean context” that creates an undefined possibility for programmes to be censored by the government. The then-Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung spoke on the cancellation saying that whilst “dissent is good for democracies”¹⁸ the test lies in “an ordinary Singaporean exercising his common sense”. Vagueness remains as there is no clarity or definition on what constitutes common sense, dissent, resistance or on being aligned to what Yale-NUS had spelt out in the college’s documents.

Recommendations

8. We reiterate our stance that Parliamentarians and Ministers ought to respect and have regard for freedom of expression by different communities in Singapore. It is our opinion that the series of moves made by PM Lee runs counter to what Singapore had assured the Human Rights Council in that the Singapore would “(e)nsure that freedom of opinion and expression are encouraged and protected, including for individuals and organizations communicating via online public platforms”.¹⁹
9. We continue to recommend that all stakeholders have more capacity building on negotiation and formalised human rights education.

Electoral System

10. There is a lack of transparency regarding the procedure of elections in Singapore²⁰ and enforcement of election rules remain selective²¹. The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) has published a report stating that Singapore’s elections

¹⁶ Yi, Seow Bei. “Yale-NUS Cancels Course on Dissent and Resistance.” *The Straits Times*, 15 Sept. 2019. Retrieved from: www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/yale-nus-cancels-course-on-dissent-and-resistance. Accessed on 18 Sept 2020

¹⁷ “Yale University Finds No Government Interference but 'Admin Errors' in Yale-NUS' Dropping of Dissent Module.” *TODAYonline*. Retrieved from: www.todayonline.com/singapore/yale-university-finds-no-government-interference-admin-errors-yale-nus-dropping-dissent. Accessed Sept 2020

¹⁸ “Why Yale-NUS Course on Dissent Was Scrapped: Ong Ye Kung.” *The Straits Times*, 8 Oct. 2019, Retrieved from: www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/why-yale-nus-course-on-dissent-was-scrapped-ong-ye-kung.

¹⁹“Matrice of Recommendations, Universal Periodic Review - Singapore.” *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/SGindex.aspx.

²⁰*Universal Periodic Review 2015 Report* (pp. 1-52, Rep. No. A/HRC/WG.6/24/SGP/3). (2015). Geneva, Switzerland: Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Retrieved from: <https://maruahsg.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/maruahupr2015-final.pdf>

²¹*Universal Periodic Review Mid-Term Report (2018)* (p. 9, Rep.). (2018). Singapore, Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://maruahsg.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/upr-mid-term-report.pdf>

are neither free nor fair²². Notably, while this report was widely covered in international and regional media, the Singapore government did not comment on it.

11. In 2020, changes to electoral boundaries were released while Singapore was still in its lockdown, called a "Circuit Breaker", caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Campaigning was conducted while social distancing rules in place. The government implemented Constituency Political Broadcast (CPBs) to give parties and candidates more airtime to put their messages out to voters. Independent candidates and political parties fielding fewer than six candidates were not eligible for party political broadcasts. This limits the avenues available for alternative voices to bring their messages across to the public. The amount of airtime allocated to each party is also dependent on the number of fielded candidates, which gives the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), a significantly longer allocation in time compared to other political parties²³ with fewer candidates. This is a disadvantage as social distancing limited visits to residents and public rallies were not allowed. The notice for elections also came without much notice for preparation for opposition parties,²⁴ largely making the playing field an uneven one.
12. This disparity in treatment of ruling party and opposition MPs continues even after the elections. A government-appointed Statutory Board, the People's Association (PA) uses allocated funds from the national budget to carry out various functions including giving assistance funds to needy residents, organising Resident's Committees, Grassroots Organisations (GROs) and working with the appointed GROs' grassroots advisers (GRAs), who are elected PAP MPs of constituencies. However *elected* (italicised for emphasis) opposition MPs are not given this recognition as either the losing PAP candidate or a PAP member is appointed as the GRA²⁵ to the constituency that had actually been won by the opposition party. Through this PA scheme, the PAP gains access to residents, to government-funded community facilities and earns a reputation of being a provider for the people, even in constituencies which they had lost.²⁶ In contrast, elected opposition party MPs resort to holding Meet-the-People Sessions in open-air void decks in public housing blocks.
13. In addition, the government provides funding for improvement projects recommended by GRAs, which gives an undue advantage to the PAP even in opposition-held constituencies as the unelected PAP GRAs are decision makers and assessors on the proposals for the constituency. An instance that was raised in Parliament was when Workers' Party's Secretary-General and MP Mr Pritam Singh²⁷. highlighted that

²² ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR). Singapore election: neither free nor fair, new report says. Retrieved from: <https://aseanmp.org/2020/06/18/singapore-report-statement/>. Accessed 11 Sept 2020

²³ Lee, D. (2020, July 01). Singapore GE2020: Political broadcasts to air daily from July 2-9. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/singapore-ge2020-political-broadcasts-to-air-daily-from-july-2-9>. Accessed 8 August 2020.

²⁴ Is campaigning allowed before Nomination Day. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.sg/article/is-campaigning-allowed-before-nomination-day>. Accessed 8 August 2020

²⁵ Yong, N. (2020, July 04). GE2020: PAP candidates will return as grassroots advisers even if they lose, says WP's Marine Parade team leader. Retrieved from: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/ge-2020-pap-candidates-will-return-as-grassroots-advisers-even-if-they-lose-says-w-ps-marine-parade-team-leader-065940721.html>. Accessed 8 August 2020

²⁶ APHR. *In Singapore, an already unfair vote undermined by COVID-19* (p. 14, Rep.). (2020). Retrieved from: https://aseanmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/APHR_Briefer_SingaporeElections_2020-06-16-1.pdf

²⁷ Yang, C. (2019, October 20). Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh, PA grassroots adviser spar over allegation of 'double standards'. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/wp-chief-pritam-singh-pap-grassroots-adviser-spar-over-allegation-of-double-standards>. Accessed 8 August 2020

a ramp at a block in his constituency was only ready and opened to the public, seven years after the proposal was submitted. This happened as assessment of the proposal and state funding for the project have to be raised to the PA's unelected but selected GRA, for consideration.

14. Notably, the then-Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Chan Chun Sing²⁸, in his response in Parliament stated the position - "we do not presume that opposition MPs believe that they are willing or able to execute this role for the government of the day" – but were willing to continue aiding in the implementation of policies and programmes. The implication of Minister Chan's words remains grave, as they appear to accuse the opposition of an unwillingness or an incapacity to function for the constituents as well raises questions on elected opposition party's MPs' integrity if they need to seek approval through such a scheme for government funds.

Recommendations

15. While we understand that the pandemic is an evolving situation and a certain degree of uncertainty is inevitable, we still note the unequal access to information between the ruling party and opposition parties in terms of changes to electoral boundaries and campaigning rules. We recommend that decision-making processes be made transparent to level the playing ground between the ruling party and opposition parties and that the Elections Department becomes an independent entity, not be part of the Prime Minister's Office.
16. We also ask for independence, fairness and equitable treatment for all elected MPs, whichever political party they belong to and that they be given access to government funds and human resources via similar processes of support and accountability.

Justice

Minimum Working Age, Corporal Punishment, and Juvenile Justice System

17. Singapore still has not made much progress with regards to the minimum legal working age of 13 years old and the minimum age of criminal responsibility of 7 years old, issues which were previously highlighted²⁹.

Death Penalty

18. While the number of people sentenced to the death sentence in Singapore in 2019 was four, this number was 13 in 2018, the highest since 2004³⁰. During the circuit-breaker period³¹ on 19 May 2020, a judge sentenced, via Zoom, Mr Punithan Genasan, a Malaysian man convicted for heroin trafficking offenses, to death. According to the Singapore Supreme Court, this was done in the interest of "the

²⁸ Sin, Y. (2018, March 08). Parliament: Grassroots advisers appointed to fulfil mission of government of the day, says Chan Chun Sing. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/grassroots-advisors-are-appointed-to-fulfil-mission-of-government-of-the-day-chan-chun-sing>. Accessed 8 August 2020

²⁹ *Universal Periodic Review Mid-Term Report (2018)* (p. 23, Rep.). (2018). Singapore, Singapore.

³⁰ Judicial Executions. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://data.gov.sg/dataset/judicial-executions>

Home Team Speeches. (2011, October 21). Retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20130605173439/http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MjE0Nw==occ0vMiT7bl. Accessed 1 August 2020

³¹ Circuit Breaker period of between 7 April 2020 and 1 June 2020

safety of all involved in the proceedings". This move was condemned as 'callous' by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

19. Access to information continues to be limited. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) did not share data on the number of clemency rejections despite the multiple attempts.³² Additionally, even though Minister of Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam stated that the MHA would review the process notifying clemency outcomes and execution dates for prisoners³³, there has been a lack of updates made publicly known regarding this review. All these point towards a lack of accountability and transparency, in addition to other issues previously highlighted³⁴ in reports. This goes against the recommendation from Finland, that Singapore accepted in 2011 - to "[m]ake available statistics and other factual information on the use of the death penalty".

Recommendations

20. We continue to reiterate our recommendations on the minimum working age, age of criminal responsibility, abolish the death penalty, be transparent, giving access to information and respecting the families of those to be hanged.

Discrimination

LGBTQIA

21. Section 377A of the Penal Code, which criminalises sex between mutually consenting adult men, remains despite multiple public appeals to the authorities to call for its repeal. In March 2020, a High Court judge dismissed three men's court actions against

³²Han, K. (2019, July 23). "Pragmatism" and Death: Capital Punishment in Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://newnaratif.com/journalism/pragmatism-and-death-capital-punishment-in-singapore/>. Accessed 1 August 2020

³³ MHA to review process of notifying clemency outcome, execution date for prisoners. (2019, August 23). Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/mha-review-process-notifying-clemency-outcome-execution-death-11709032>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

Universal Periodic Review Mid-Term Report (2018) (p. 6, Rep.). (2018). Singapore, Singapore
Since mid-2016, it is noted that there is now less time between the rejection of a death row inmate's appeal for clemency, and the scheduling of an execution. Previously, there was a gap of over a week or two between the rejection of clemency and the scheduling of an execution. However, as families of death row inmates have observed, in recent cases, the inmates had been executed either on the same day of the rejection of clemency or very soon after the failed appeal for clemency

³⁴*Universal Periodic Review Mid-Term Report (2018)* (p. 6, Rep.). (2018). Singapore, Singapore.
Though the Singapore Prison Service publishes the number of executions that take place each year in its annual report, these executions are not always made available to the public via press releases from government agencies. There is a lack of accessible information related to the use of the death penalty in Singapore, for example, the total number of inmates on death row, for instance, is not made public.

Section 377A³⁵, in line with PM Lee's statement in June 2019 that Section 377A will be around 'for some time'³⁶

22. There, concordantly, continues to be no laws to protect specifically LGBTQ persons from discrimination. Nonetheless, in the recent amendment to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA), the LGBTQ community was explicitly named by Minister K. Shanmugam as an example of non-religious groups that are protected under the amended Act.³⁷
23. In a landmark case in 2018, the High Court granted a gay man to legally adopt his five year old biological son who was born through a surrogate mother in the United States. However, the court emphasized that this decision was ultimately made in the best interest of the child's well-being.³⁸

Recommendations

24. We acknowledge the amendment made to the MRHA. Nonetheless we ask again that Section 377A be repealed, we enact an Anti-Discrimination law in Singapore to protect LGBTQ Singaporeans and become inclusive.
25. We are also heartened that the court has made decisions in favour of the well-being of dependents over archaic beliefs on sexual orientation and see this as a small step in the right direction.

Equality of Races

26. Covid-19 has brought to the forefront issues related to race and ethnicity. Facebook had to remove a few vile postings. These postings also triggered experiences of prejudice and discrimination that Singaporeans – mainly the Indians and Malays – have experienced.³⁹ The MRHA is not adequate enough.

Recommendations

27. We ask for an Anti-Discrimination law, sensitised training for teachers and human resource personnel and on human rights as a value system.

Women

³⁵ Justice See Kee Oon said, in a case summary released by the court, Section 377A "serves the purpose of safeguarding public morality by showing societal moral disapproval of male homosexual acts".

Lam, L. (2020, March 30). High Court judge dismisses all three challenges to Section 377A. Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/377a-challenge-dismissed-high-court-judge-penal-code-12588738>. Accessed 5 August 2020

³⁶ Ng, J. (2019, June 26). 377A will be around 'for some time', will not inhibit how S'pore attracts tech talent: PM Lee. Retrieved from: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/377a-will-be-around-some-time-will-not-inhibit-how-spore-attracts-tech-talent-pm-lee>. Accessed 5 August 2020

³⁷ Koh, F. (2020, March 02). Parliament: Law protects both religious groups and LGBT community from threats, says Shanmugam. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-law-protects-both-religious-groups-and-lgbt-community-from-threats-says>. Accessed 5 August 2020

³⁸ Ong, J. (2018, December 17). Gay father permitted to adopt biological son born via surrogacy, in first for Singapore. Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/gay-father-adopt-surrogate-son-singapore-11039384>. Accessed 5 August 2020

³⁹ Mathews, Mathew & Pereira, Shane, Today, August 2020. Why Singapore needs new ways to tackle racism more effectively. Retrieved from: <https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/why-singapore-needs-new-ways-tackle-racism-more-effectively>. Accessed 13 October 2020

28. Women in Singapore are still under-represented politically⁴⁰ and in the workforce⁴¹. Even while the 2020 General Elections resulted in women gaining 29 per cent of the seats - the highest number in Singapore's history, this is still a highly disproportionate number. This is especially so as the number of women with university is almost the same as the number of men with a university degree⁴².

Recommendations

29. While this issue has been noted by politicians⁴³, much still remains to be done at a social and political level. Even with the repealing of marital immunity for rape as part of the changes to Singapore's penal code⁴⁴, the State needs to actively push for gender parity in Singapore. It is not enough for Ministers to highlight that societal mind sets should change⁴⁵ but there must be equity in society. Singapore has previously supported recommendations relating to the acting against the discrimination against women. Hence the government needs to work on these agreed commitments,⁴⁶ enact an anti-discrimination law and make constitutional amendments to include gender equality.

Income Inequalities / Job Opportunities

⁴⁰ From 2006 to 2019, the representation of women parliamentarians has remained consistent at slightly more than 20%.

Hirschmann, R. (2020, January 27). Singapore: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/730313/singapore-proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliament/>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

⁴¹ McKinsey Global Institute: The power of parity: advancing women's equality in Asia Pacific, Focus Singapore (April 2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Gender%20Equality/The%20power%20of%20parity%20Advancing%20womens%20equality%20in%20Asia%20Pacific/MGI-The-power-of-parity-Advancing-womens-equality-in-Asia-pacific-Executive-summary.pdf>. Accessed 18 Aug 2020

⁴² As of 17 February 2020, within the age bracket of 25-29 years old, there were 475,700 men with a university degree, and 470,500 women with a university degree. Singapore Department Of Statistics: SingStat Table Builder - Variables/Time Period Selection. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=12078>. Accessed 9 August 2020

⁴³ Second Minister for Manpower Josephine Teo highlighted in a 2018 speech at the Committee of Supply that the Ministry of Manpower is committed that the Ministry was committed to making workplaces progressive for all, including women.

Speech by Mrs Josephine Teo Second Minister for Manpower at Committee of Supply 2018. (2018, March 6). Retrieved from: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/speeches/2018/0305-speech-by-mrs-josephine-teo-second-minister-for-manpower-at-committee-of-supply-2018>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

Speaking on gender parity at the Singapore Committee for UN Women's annual gala fundraising dinner in September 2017, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung noted that Singapore is still struggling on this issue due to society's expectation of women's roles.

Li, T. W. (2017, September 23). Mindsets must shift to close gender pay gap. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mindsets-must-shift-to-close-gender-pay-gap>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

⁴⁴ Kwang, K. (2019, February 11). Marital immunity for rape set to be repealed as part of changes to Singapore's Penal Code. Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/marital-immunity-for-rape-set-to-be-repealed-as-part-of-changes-11229224>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

⁴⁵ Li, T. W. (2017, September 23). Mindsets must shift to close gender pay gap. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mindsets-must-shift-to-close-gender-pay-gap>. Accessed 1 Aug 2020

⁴⁶ "Matrix of Recommendations, Universal Periodic Review - Singapore." OHCHR, www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/SGindex.aspx.

30. Singapore is one of the few high-income countries that lacks a minimum wage provision, preferring a Progressive Wage Model⁴⁷ (PWM). There are concerns over the PWM's inadequacy to keep up with rising costs and the slow roll out of the PWM has been raised in previous reports.⁴⁸ Recent interest in minimum wage provision has further highlighted deficits of the PWM. Economist Linda Lim pointed out that in comparison to a minimum wage provision, the PWM is unnecessarily bureaucratic and does not address the root cause of low wages through the influx of cheap foreign labour.⁴⁹ Attempts to bring minimum wage into mainstream discourse have largely been met with resistance from the government. As also evidenced when Workers' Party (WP) Member of Parliament Jamus Lim was challenged by six PAP MPs including the Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam⁵⁰ on his arguments and recommendations on the subject.
31. In 2018, Singapore ranked 149 out of 157 countries in the "Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index" released by Oxfam in association with Developmental Finance International.⁵¹ This was a sharp drop from the 86th position out of 152 countries, as held in 2017. The drop has been attributed to "harmful tax practices".
32. In 2020, the pandemic has further exacerbated existing inequalities in Singapore. According to a recent Jobstreet survey, one in four Singaporeans has been laid off hitting the short-term and low-income workers, hardest.⁵² This matter was raised by Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Walter Theseira who said that Singapore had focused too much on⁵³ market forces, failing to reflect on its true social value. He shared how frontline workers such as cleaners, the most needed during the pandemic, yet Singapore's value of them, is not reflected in their wages. Though various policies have been rolled out by the government to support Singaporeans, there still remains certain gaps as pointed out by NMP Anthea Ong who pointed out that the "overly strict eligibility criteria", the "ungenerous amount" and "duration of support" given through the Covid-19 Support Grant made it ominous and did not address vulnerable communities such as daily-rated workers and those without bank

⁴⁷ In place of a national minimum wage, the Progressive Wage Model (PWM) aims to increase the salaries of low wage workers by enhancing skills and productivity in certain sectors.

What is the Progressive Wage Model. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/progressive-wage-model/what-is-pwm>. Accessed 9 Aug 2020.

⁴⁸ *Universal Periodic Review Mid-Term Report (2018)* (p. 17, Rep.). (2018). Singapore, Singapore.

⁴⁹ Lim, L. (2020, July 25). The economic case for a Minimum Wage: A conversation with Linda Lim - Academia: SG. Retrieved from: <https://www.academia.sg/academic-views/minimum-wage-conversation/>. Accessed 5 Aug 2020

⁵⁰ Tang, S. (2020, September 04). Tharman, PAP MPs debate minimum wage, policymaking with WP's Jamus Lim. Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/parliament-jamus-lim-tharman-minimum-wage-13079634>. Accessed 11 Sept 2020.

⁵¹ Oxfam, "Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index", October 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/commitment-reducing-inequality-index-2018>. Accessed 5 August 2020.

⁵² One in four Singaporeans laid off amidst pandemic. (2020, June 29). Retrieved from: <https://sbr.com.sg/hr-education/in-focus/one-in-four-singaporeans-laid-off-amidst-pandemic>. Accessed 5 Aug 2020

⁵³ Tee, Z. (2020, February 27). Budget debate: Black Death offers lessons for dealing with Covid-19 outbreak, says NMP Walter Theseira. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/budget-debate-black-death-offers-lessons-for-dealing-with-covid-19-outbreak-says-walter>. Accessed 11 Sept 2020

accounts.⁵⁴

Recommendations

33. The government has implemented some policies to improve the social welfare of people but there are still some gaps as pointed out earlier. We recommend that the government be more open to alternative criticisms on policies as they could also possibly be solutions. The government also needs to review its policies to meet the people's 'adequate standard of living' which means having: a roof over one's head; a sustainable livelihood; food and affordable healthcare. This recommendation needs to be accepted as it is a core human rights value and is also part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁵⁴ Zhuo, T., Ting, C., & Han, G. (2020, June 05). Highlights: DPM Heng rounds up \$33b Fortitude Budget debate. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/live-parliament-debates-33b-fortitude-budget-for-covid-19-measures-0>. Accessed 5 Aug 2020; Gaps in Covid-19 Support Funds. Retrieved from: <https://medium.com/@antheandraong/gaps-in-covid-19-support-schemes-5d92d722772e>. Accessed 13 October 2020