



General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 October 2015

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
Twenty-fourth session
18-29 January 2016

National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Singapore

* The present document has been reproduced as received. Its content does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations.



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	3
A. Singapore at 50	3
B. Governance in Singapore and our approach to human rights	3
II. Methodology and consultation process	4
III. Building a fair and inclusive society	5
A. Strengthening social protection	5
B. Preserving social harmony	16
IV. Conclusion	20

I. Introduction

A. Singapore at 50

1. This year, Singapore celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence. The Singapore story is marked by its rapid rise from the Third World to First with broad-based social uplift for its citizens in one generation. By most international indices, Singapore has done well for a small state without natural resources. Singapore is ranked 9th in the UN's 2014 Human Development Index; 6th in the EIU's 2014 Where-to-be born Index; 9th in the 2015 World Justice Report's Rule of Law Index; 1st in Bloomberg's 2014 ranking of the most efficient healthcare systems; our GDP per capita is S\$71,380 (1S\$ ~ US\$0.72 as at 12 Oct 2015); we have one of the highest home ownership rates in the world; and our students performed best in the latest OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test for creative problem-solving.

B. Governance in Singapore and our approach to human rights

2. Despite our achievements, we do not take this development trajectory for granted and recognise we can still improve in many areas. Our fundamental political, economic and geostrategic constraints remain unchanged. Singapore is still a small, densely populated and diverse island city-state of 5.5 million people, comprising 3.4 million citizens, 0.5 million foreign citizens with Permanent Resident status, and another 1.4 million foreign citizens living and working in the country, all within a land area of around 710 km² (slightly larger than the surface area of Lake Geneva).

3. Our resident population, largely descendants of immigrants, is ethnically diverse, comprising 74.1% Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9.2% Indians and 3.3% from other ethnicities. We are 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 from numerous other faiths. The Pew Research Centre described Singapore as the most religiously diverse country in the world in 2014.

4. We are fully committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights of our citizens. We take a practical, not an ideological approach to the realisation of human rights. Human rights exist in specific cultural, social, economic and historical contexts. In every country, accommodation must be reached among the competing rights of the individuals who make up the nation and the interests of society as a whole. We therefore firmly apply the rule of law to ensure stability, equality and social justice, which are the necessary conditions for respecting the fundamental human rights enshrined in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also focus on delivering good socio-economic outcomes through pragmatic public policies.

5. Stability, security, and social harmony are the key prerequisites for economic growth, which enables the Government to care for and protect Singaporeans. For Singapore, our immediate priority after independence was to scrupulously manage our racial and religious differences, while steadily forging a nation out of immigrants. This was against the backdrop of religious and racial riots in the 1950s and 1960s, which were searing events in Singapore's history. For this reason, maintaining racial and religious harmony has been the Government's top priority ever since.

6. We did this by enshrining and upholding the core principles of secularism, meritocracy and multi-racialism to ensure equal standing and opportunities for all citizens. Recognising the primordial pulls of race, religion and language, and that social harmony

must be sustained by human endeavour, the Government took a pragmatic approach and intervened to expand common spaces and experiences for all citizens. At the same time, we were sensitive to the needs of every community, and gave each community the space to grow and preserve its heritage, in order to sustain social harmony.

7. From the early years of our development, we have also made significant investment in the key social pillars of housing, healthcare and education to meet the basic needs of Singaporeans in a broad-based manner. We have continually enhanced and refined our policies to ensure that they meet the evolving needs and aspirations of Singaporeans in a changing world. Over the past decade, we have made important policy shifts to strengthen our social safety nets to better protect vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the low- and middle-income. We have refined our education policy to cater to the different strengths and talents of Singaporeans to help them realise their potential while creating a more vibrant economy. To stay responsive to the needs of a more diverse society, we have widened public consultations and devised new ways to better deliver public services.

8. 50 years on, we believe this broad approach towards governance remains as relevant as ever, if not more so. While there is a stronger sense of national identity, the complexion of Singapore society is also changing. Societal differences are not just along ethnic or religious lines. Globalisation has led to greater income and social stratification. More foreigners are living and working in Singapore. There are growing interest groups on issues from environment, heritage, and gender to animal rights. Our population is rapidly ageing even as the economic landscape becomes more uncertain. Technology is transforming society and bringing in new ideas, but also exposing us to divisive forces like religious extremism from other parts of the world. The arrests this year of self-radicalised Singaporeans planning to carry out terrorist attacks in Singapore is a case in point.

9. More than ever, the Government needs to engage the different groups more deeply and balance their competing interests in a pragmatic way. Our policy trade-offs will become sharper as challenges become more complex. We will have to continue the process of integrating the different groups. Our approach will be key to help us nurture social harmony while building a fair and inclusive society.

10. The Government's policy direction is validated through regular elections with universal franchise. The latest General Election in September 2015 saw a resounding 69.9% win for the incumbent People's Action Party, signaling a strong endorsement for the Government and its policies in the period under review and its future direction. The Government will continue to stay in close touch with all segments of our society and pay keen attention to societal changes so that our policies and legislation can better promote and protect the human rights of our citizens and improve their well-being.

II. Methodology and consultation process

11. Singapore is committed to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. While we have done well so far, we believe we can benefit from the UPR as it is an opportunity for us to listen to others' views, take stock of our progress, and engage our citizens and civil society on the way forward to promote and protect their rights.

12. In our first UPR in 2011, Singapore supported in whole or in part 84 of 112 recommendations. An Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights periodically tracks and reviews the implementation of our recommendations. This report describes the implementation of the recommendations Singapore accepted, in whole or in part, and other significant related policy developments since the first review. Due to space constraints, this report does not reference all the recommendations which Singapore accepted in 2011 and has since implemented.

13. The Government has consulted our citizens and civil society widely. In 2012, we conducted a year-long open consultation exercise involving some 50,000 citizens known as “*Our Singapore Conversation*” to engage citizens from all walks of life on their hopes, concerns and visions for the future. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights also conducted two rounds of consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs) to seek their views for our second UPR review.

III. Building a fair and inclusive society

14. We seek to build a nation where our citizens lead meaningful and fulfilling lives in a fair and inclusive society. To build a successful economy and share the fruits of growth with all Singaporeans, we need effective social strategies that enable individuals to fully realise their potential, help the less advantaged so that they have a fair chance to succeed regardless of their starting point in life, and protect the most vulnerable groups in society.

A. Strengthening social protection

15. The Government has been rebalancing our economic and social strategies to promote growth while mitigating inequality and giving our citizens greater assurance at each stage of their lives. Decisive policy shifts were introduced in the last decade in response to domestic feedback as well as external developments such as more intense global competition, and the impact of technology on job security and wage growth.

16. Since the last review, the Government has introduced progressive new policies to enhance social protection for our citizens, in particular the elderly and the low- and middle-income. Substantial investments were also made to improve the quality of education, healthcare and housing. However, we did so in fiscally sustainable ways that do not burden future generations, and reinforce individual and collective responsibilities.

1. Support for lower income Singaporeans (Recommendations 94.7 and 94.10)

17. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.7 and 94.10 because promoting social mobility is a key policy goal. We target our support at the low- and middle-income groups, and in areas which will help them most, particularly education, housing and healthcare.

18. Workfare Income Supplement. The Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) scheme tops up the salary and retirement savings of low-wage workers aged 35 and above. This scheme encourages them to work regularly and boosts their retirement adequacy.

19. *We enhanced the WIS in 2013 to increase the payouts and to benefit a larger pool of lower-wage workers.* To complement the WIS, the Government provides incentives for self-initiated training and encourages employers to send their workers, including older workers, for training and skills upgrading. This includes a 95% course fee subsidy.

20. Progressive Wage Model. The Progressive Wage Model (PWM) is a wage-skill ladder that ties wages to training and improvements in productivity. This means *workers can get higher wages as they become better skilled, more productive and take on more responsibilities.* Since June 2012, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) has led the development of PWMs in various sectors. For the cleaning, security and landscape sectors in particular, the Government enforces the PWMs, which are negotiated among unions, employers and the Government. This approach is important as low-wage workers in these sectors have limited bargaining power to improve their wages. Since September 2015, all cleaning companies in Singapore have to adopt the PWM while the landscaping and security sectors will do so in June and September 2016 respectively.

21. Bringing social assistance closer to the needy. The Community Care Endowment Fund (ComCare) is the main source of social assistance for low-income Singaporeans. Through ComCare, the Government provides support such as cash assistance or subsidies on a discretionary basis, depending on the circumstances of the individual or family.

22. *To bring such social assistance closer to the needy, the Government began establishing a network of Social Service Offices (SSOs) in targeted neighbourhoods across Singapore in 2013.* More than 95% of Singaporeans who benefit from social assistance now live within 2km of an SSO. Besides financial aid, the SSOs also help these Singaporeans look for work and training opportunities, and connect them to other social agencies and community partners for other forms of assistance. The SSOs, being closer to the vulnerable groups, also provide valuable feedback to the Government so that it can tweak its social policies to match evolving needs on the ground and ensure services are delivered effectively to those in need. To date, the Government has set up 23 SSOs.

2. Education (Recommendations 94.1, 94.2, 94.3, 94.4, 94.6)

23. With no natural resources, Singapore has always invested heavily in our people to stay competitive. Education is also a social leveller that enables all Singaporeans, regardless of their background, to realise their potential and achieve their aspirations, thus building an inclusive society.

24. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.1, 94.2, 94.3, 94.4 and 94.6 because we remain committed to providing good education for every Singaporean and creating an environment that fosters lifelong learning. We aim to develop our children in all aspects – moral, cognitive, physical, and social – to enable them to discover their talents, realise their potential, and develop a lifelong passion for learning. We invest significantly in education by providing our schools with the best teachers possible and the most effective learning tools. *We have increased our annual expenditure on education from S\$10.9 billion in financial year (FY) 2011 to S\$11.5 billion in FY 2014, which is about 20% of the Government's annual expenditure.*

25. Creating more education pathways. We have multiple education pathways to cater to the different talents, strengths and interests of our students, and to equip them with skills to meet the needs of our evolving economy. *In 2014, the Government commissioned the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE) to recommend ways to strengthen our applied education.* Based on the review, our polytechnics and vocational training institutes will strengthen their linkages to industry to provide enhanced training for students and enhance their career prospects.

26. Lifelong Learning through SkillsFuture Movement. To prepare Singaporeans for a more competitive and dynamic economic landscape, *we are transforming our learning culture to emphasise the mastery of skills and lifelong learning. The Government launched the SkillsFuture movement in 2015. We will spend over S\$1 billion per year from 2015 to 2020 on initiatives to support lifelong learning.* This will start in schools where students will receive enhanced education and career guidance. At work, there will be training subsidies to help Singaporeans stay relevant in their jobs. Other initiatives include more structured on-the-job training for new job entrants, and SkillsFuture study awards and fellowships for more experienced professionals seeking mastery in their fields. Each Singaporean aged 25 and above will have a personal SkillsFuture Credit account, to which the Government will make periodic financial top-ups. Singaporeans can use this account to fund training courses for their professional development.

27. Ensuring access to education for all. We have schemes and financial aid programmes to support children with a weaker start so that they have a good chance to succeed in life. Early intervention is the key to improving the prospects of a less

advantaged child. *At the pre-school level, the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme was extended in 2014 to provide more means-tested fee assistance. A Pre-school Opportunity Fund was set up in 2013 to support projects that promote the holistic development of children from less advantaged or at-risk backgrounds.* This allows children from poor families to benefit from programmes such as Learning Journeys.

28. Students from needy families have their school fees waived and those at the primary and secondary levels also receive free textbooks and uniforms. For higher education institutions, bursaries are available. *The Government raised the qualifying monthly household income threshold to S\$1,900 in 2014, which makes the bursaries available to children from two-thirds of Singaporean households.*

29. Some Muslim students prefer an education that incorporates teachings of their religion. They can do so at any of the six privately-run full-time *madrasahs*, which offer curricula that include both religious and secular subjects at the primary, secondary and pre-university levels. *Less advantaged students in the madrasahs also receive assistance which covers not only school fees but also allowances for transport, meals, textbooks and school uniforms.*

3. Healthcare (Recommendations 94.1, 94.2, 94.3, 94.5, 95.1, 94.4)

30. Singapore's public healthcare system is designed to provide quality and affordable medical services for all Singaporeans. We want all Singaporeans to live long, live well and live with peace of mind. Our national Medisave, Medishield, Eldersshield, Medifund schemes help Singaporeans co-pay their medical expenses. Means-testing helps to ensure that subsidies are better targeted across income groups.

31. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.1–3, 94.5, 95.1 and 94.4 because we are committed to providing universal healthcare coverage to citizens, so that no Singaporean will be denied public healthcare because of financial limitations. *Since the last review, we have also expanded our subsidies for elderly care services to cover two-thirds of Singaporean households and increased the subsidies to up to 80%.*

32. Launch of universal healthcare scheme "MediShield Life". *The Government launched MediShield Life in 2015 to provide basic health insurance protection for life for all Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, including the very old and those with pre-existing illnesses.* The Government will bear most of the cost for this policy. To be covered by MediShield Life, Singaporeans will need to pay only a small increase from their current premiums for their existing national health schemes. The Government will provide subsidies and financial support to the needy to cover them.

4. An ageing society (Recommendations 94.12, 94.13)

33. Singapore is one of the fastest-ageing societies in the world. By 2030, about 1 in 5 Singaporeans will be aged 65 and above, up from around 1 in 9 today. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.12–13 because we want all Singaporeans to age well and lead fulfilling lives. We recognise the need for a comprehensive response to an ageing population. We will provide quality and affordable care for elderly persons and help them maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. We are putting in place programmes and infrastructure to benefit the elderly today and prepare for the future when more of our citizens will be elderly. *We have also extended an invitation to the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons Ms Rosa Kornfeld-Matte to visit Singapore in 2016.*

34. Comprehensive action plan for elderly Singaporeans. *In August 2015, the Ministerial Committee on Ageing announced a S\$3 billion national action plan to help Singaporeans age confidently and lead active lives.* The plan includes about 60 initiatives

covering areas such as health and wellness, learning, employment, housing, transport, public spaces, retirement adequacy, healthcare and aged care, protection of vulnerable seniors and research. For example, a new National Silver Academy will be set up to offer a wide range of learning opportunities for seniors to stay active.

35. Pioneer Generation Package. *The Government launched a S\$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package in February 2014 to help more than 450,000 senior citizens (called the Pioneer Generation, born on or before 31 December 1949) to defray basic medical expenses through more subsidies, giving them peace of mind over medical costs.* This one-off, fully funded package recognises the contributions of the first generation of Singaporeans to our nation-building.

36. *Since September 2014, the Pioneer Generation has enjoyed additional medical subsidies for treatment at public Specialist Outpatient Clinics and polyclinics under the Community Health Assist Scheme.* They also receive a special subsidy for their premiums for MediShield Life. The Government will cover 40% to 60% of their premiums for life, according to their age.

37. Providing High Quality and Affordable Care Facilities. *We are building more nursing homes, and upgrading public infrastructure and services to cater to the needs of the growing number of seniors with physical impairments.* We are gradually increasing the number of nursing home beds from 9,700 today to 17,000 by 2020 to meet the needs of seniors who do not have family support. These new nursing home beds will be housed in eldercare facilities, many of which will also be hubs providing care services to the local community. Senior care centres will provide both health and social services so that seniors and caregivers can access them under one roof. *To ensure a high quality of care in nursing homes, the Government will introduce the Enhanced Nursing Home Standards from 2016 onwards.*

38. We want our senior citizens to receive medical care in the comfort of their homes or within their community. *We are therefore expanding our home care services.* We will increase the number of home care places from 6,500 today to 10,000 by 2020, and the number of centre-based care places from 2,800 to 6,200 in the same period. Our agencies are developing guidelines for these providers to ensure better care for our seniors.

39. Home Modifications for Seniors. *The Housing and Development Board (HDB) launched the Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) programme in 2012 to make flats safer and more elder-friendly.* Home improvements such as slip-resistant treatment for bathroom floor tiles, installation of “grab bars” in the bathrooms, and wheelchair ramps will be provided at subsidised rates. Depending on their flat type, households can enjoy up to 95% subsidy of the cost for these home modifications.

40. Employment for the elderly. We want to help our senior citizens remain gainfully employed so that they can age with dignity, enjoy income security and continue to contribute to the community. *The Prime Minister announced in August 2015 that the Government will raise the re-employment age from 65 to 67 by 2017.*

41. *Special schemes were also introduced since the last review to incentivise employers to hire older Singaporeans. A key initiative is the Special Employment Credit (SEC) scheme launched in 2011.* Under the SEC, employers who hire Singaporeans above 50 years of age and earning up to S\$4,000 a month will be reimbursed up to 8.5% of the employee’s monthly wages in 2015. *Recognising that companies may need to redesign jobs and provide on-the-job training for older workers, we introduced the WorkPro programme in 2013 to provide financial support to companies for such activities.*

42. Universal retirement savings scheme. Singapore’s Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a compulsory savings scheme for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. Employees

contribute a proportion of their monthly salary into their CPF account, while their employers also contribute a percentage. Through the CPF LIFE, a national annuity scheme, Singaporeans receive payouts from their retirement savings for as long as they live. We continually review CPF policies including CPF contribution rates and CPF interest rates to ensure retirement adequacy for our citizens.

43. Silver Support Scheme. To take care of elderly with lesser means in their retirement years, *the Government announced the Silver Support Scheme in 2015 to supplement the incomes of the bottom 20 to 30% of elderly Singaporeans.* This scheme provides between S\$300 to S\$750 every quarter to eligible Singaporean senior citizens aged 65 and above. Some 150,000 senior citizens are expected to benefit from this scheme.

44. Protection of vulnerable adults. With more frail elderly and ageing persons with disabilities, *the Government will be enacting new legislation – the Vulnerable Adults Act – in 2016 to provide for early intervention and better protect vulnerable adults from abuse and harm* due to neglect and self-neglect. This Act will be supported by community efforts to help family members cope with their caregiving duties, to better detect and report cases of abuse, neglect and self-neglect, as well as to befriend and support vulnerable adults and their families.

5. Housing (Recommendations 94.1, 94.7)

45. Home ownership is a key social pillar of Singapore. 90.3% of Singaporeans own their homes in 2014. Of these, 80.4% of Singapore citizens live in flats built by HDB, which are sold to them at subsidised rates on 99-year leases. Home ownership in Singapore promotes social stability, community integration and capital accumulation. The Government has various financial grants and support schemes to help Singaporeans in varying circumstances buy flats so that every Singaporean has a stake in our country. *Since the last review, we have enhanced some housing policies and subsidies.*

46. Subsidies to buy flats and subsidised rental flats. In 2011, the HDB introduced a generous Special CPF Housing Grant of up to S\$20,000 (raised to S\$40,000 in 2015), in addition to the regular housing subsidies and grants, to help more low and middle-income families own their first flat. An additional Step-Up CPF Housing Grant of S\$15,000 was introduced in August 2013 to help low-income families in two-room flats upgrade to three-room flats.

47. Since 2013, low-income single citizens can also buy certain categories of new flats either jointly or individually. Citizens who are currently unable to afford flats can rent smaller flats at subsidised rates.

48. Design of HDB estates. Social equity is not just about individual home ownership. It is also about fostering inclusiveness for all Singaporeans, regardless of social background, throughout our HDB neighbourhoods. All HDB estates are designed to give all residents full access to transport, commercial, recreational, medical, educational and religious facilities. Apart from their utility, these are also common spaces that bring residents together and improve social integration. In addition, the Government has made existing public housing estates more friendly for persons with disabilities by retrofitting the estates with barrier-free features, such as ramps, railings and levelling of steps. We have improved accessibility for almost all buildings frequently used by the public as well, such as community clubs, government offices, hospitals, polyclinics and libraries.

49. Under the Greenprint initiative, HDB will bring green and sustainable lifestyles into neighbourhoods and individual flats. HDB has launched a S\$1 million Greenprint Fund for communities to develop and test-bed innovative green solutions in HDB estates.

50. Upgrading programmes. Older HDB flats and estates are also rejuvenated through continuous upgrading programmes to ensure that the amenities meet the needs of their inhabitants as they move through different phases of their lives. *We have set aside more spaces for pre-school childcare centres in newer estates with more young families and installed more elderly-friendly features in the older estates since the last review.*

6. Rights of women (Recommendations 94.13, 94.23, 94.24, 95.7, 95.8, 95.9, 95.10)

51. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.13, 94.23–24 and 95.7–10 because we are fully committed to ensure that women and girls are protected, supported and empowered. Equal opportunities are available to all citizens, irrespective of their gender. Singapore is ranked 15th out of 152 countries on the Gender Inequality Index in the 2014 UN Human Development Report. We are also ranked 14th out of 179 countries in the 2015 State of the World's Mothers Report.

52. Singapore commemorates the 20th anniversary of its accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2015. The Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW monitors progress on the implementation of our CEDAW obligations, and other measures taken to protect the needs of women. Women in Singapore are able to live in and travel to any part of the city alone at any time of the day or night without fear of harassment, attacks or abuse. Sexual offences against women are dealt with seriously and punished severely.

53. Women's participation in public life. Women are better represented and occupy important positions in the public, corporate and civil society sectors today, although representation at the higher corporate levels can be further improved. The Public Service tries to lead the way on this front. As of 2014, women constituted 56.7% of the Civil Service. 6 of the 23 Permanent Secretaries and 9 of the 32 Deputy Secretaries were women. Women made up 23% of the judges in the Supreme Court, and 48%, 69% and 48% of the total number of judicial officers in the State Courts, Family Justice Courts and Supreme Court respectively. Half of the officers in the Foreign Service are women. We now have many inspiring examples of women in leadership positions in public life. Singapore's first female Speaker of Parliament, Madam Halimah Yacob, was appointed in January 2013. There are currently one female Minister, four female Senior Ministers of State, and one female Parliamentary Secretary in the Government. 2 out of our 5 mayors are women.

54. Enhancing support for women. Women tend to shoulder disproportionate responsibility for care of the family. *We are therefore doing more to reduce the work-family trade-offs that many Singaporean women continue to face.* We have made it easier for fathers to take leave from work so that they can shoulder more parenting responsibilities. *In 2013, the Government introduced one week of Government-Paid Paternity Leave and one week of Government-Paid Shared Parental Leave. The Paternity Leave scheme was further extended to two weeks in 2015.* This enhanced scheme will first be implemented by the Civil Service. Companies will be given more time to adjust their policies and can adopt the additional week of paternity leave on a voluntary basis for now. *We also encourage companies to offer flexible work arrangements.*

55. Practice of Muslim Law. The practice of Muslim law in Singapore is progressive, and takes into account evolving societal contexts and norms. *The fatwa (religious ruling) on revocable insurance nomination was updated in February 2012 to allow Muslim policy holders to nominate their spouse or dependants to receive the full payout from the insurance company as a valid inter vivos gift.* Before this policy change, a Muslim man could not leave his insurance company payout to his wife and children even if he wished. This new *fatwa* enables Muslims to secure the rights of their spouses and dependants through properly planned nominations according to civil law and in line with the objectives and spirit of Muslim family law.

56. *Since October 2014, the Syariah Court has implemented a differentiated case management system for cases involving a high risk of domestic violence.* Parties in such cases go through specialised counselling with PAVE, a family violence specialist centre, instead of normal marriage counselling. Video conferencing is also used in these Court sessions to protect the victims of family violence. Although this new policy applies to both genders, it has strengthened the protection of women since most victims of domestic violence are women.

57. Support for foreign spouses of Singaporeans. The rate of transnational marriages in Singapore continues to grow and 31% of marriages in 2014 involved a Singaporean and a non-Singaporean (often the female partner). To help these foreign spouses of Singaporeans integrate into Singapore society, *we introduced a Marriage Support Programme in 2014 to help couples address the unique challenges of transnational marriages.* The programme, *inter alia*, teaches the foreign spouses basic conversational skills and provides advice on employment issues. The Ministry of Manpower also allows foreign spouses with a Long Term Visit Pass to apply for jobs in Singapore.

7. Rights of children (Recommendations 94.13, 95.11, 95.12, 96.37, 96.38)

58. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.13, 95.11-12 and 96.37-38 because every child is precious. We do our best and devote as much resources as we can to care for them and maximise their potential regardless of their race, gender, or starting point in life. We have described some of these policies in the sections on “Education”, “Health” and “Lower Income Households” above.

59. Recognising that child protection is a multi-faceted issue, we adopt a holistic approach through inter-agency working groups such as the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Family Violence Dialogue Group, the National Family Violence Networking System, Regional Family Violence Working Groups, and the Inter-Ministry Workgroup on Child Protection.

60. Singapore is fully committed to our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). *We are currently considering accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.* Like the other treaties we accede to, we want to ensure that necessary legislation and resources are in place at the time of accession so that our obligations can be implemented immediately.

61. Review of legislative framework to protect children. The Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) and the Women’s Charter are the key pieces of legislation through which we exercise our CRC obligations. The Government regularly reviews relevant legislation to ensure that we meet our commitments and to provide the best protection for our children.

62. *The CYPA was amended in 2011 to improve protection for children and young persons (CYPs).* Under the amended law, all CYP welfare homes must be licensed in order to enhance the welfare and protection of CYPs under their charge. The relevant public officers are now empowered to make inquiries into cases where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person is in need of care and protection. The identity of the child or young person subject to an investigation or taken into custodial care will also be better safeguarded. We have convicted offenders for the sexual exploitation of children, and raised the penalties for these offences whether it takes place in Singapore or overseas.

63. Protecting child victims of violence. *Singapore implemented new initiatives in 2012 and 2013 to better protect child victims of violence.* These include the development of community-based child protection specialist centres to manage moderate-risk cases, the establishment of Therapeutic Group Homes for children recovering from serious and

chronic abuse or neglect, care-giving disruptions, or whose behaviour requires a targeted programme.

64. Training of stakeholders. *We equip our stakeholders – social workers, healthcare officers and police officers – with the latest skills and knowledge to better protect our children* through workshops and events such as the annual National Family Violence Networking Symposium. These platforms promote the sharing of best practices and strengthen partnerships among relevant stakeholders. The Family Violence Dialogue Group has also developed a training roadmap for professionals.

65. Support for families, specifically children, affected by divorce. *The Government introduced new measures in 2015 to enhance support for divorced families.* The aim is to highlight children's interests and help children and families cope better with the changes from a divorce. Four specialist agencies have been set up to provide support services to divorcing and divorced couples, such as information and non-legal advice, case management and counselling. New programmes have also been introduced to impart coping skills to affected families and children. In 2016, divorcing couples with young children who are unable to agree on the divorce and ancillary matters will be required to attend a Mandatory Parenting Programme before filing for divorce.

66. Improvements under Syariah Court. The Syariah Court supports Muslim families affected by divorce. *From 2015, the Syariah Court will require couples with children under 14 years of age to provide a post-divorce co-parenting and care arrangement plan, and attend a free post-divorce consultation session.* The purpose is to help these couples better understand the impact of divorce on their children, and learn co-parenting and self-care strategies. *The Syariah Court is also producing resource materials, such as videos for parents, booklets for children to better cope with divorce, and a post-divorce kit on co-parenting.*

67. Family Justice Courts. *We introduced the Family Justice Courts (FJC) in October 2014.* The FJC is empowered to adjudicate and resolve family disputes more effectively, so as to reduce trauma and acrimony. The FJC improves our family justice system by streamlining the legal processes and reducing costs, while focusing on the best interests of the affected children.

8. Persons with disabilities (Recommendations 94.2, 94.11, 94.12, 94.13, 95.2, 95.3, 96.6)

68. Singapore supported Recommendations 94.2, 94.11–13, 95.2–3 and 96.6. We strive to build an inclusive society where persons with disabilities are recognised, empowered and given every opportunity to become integral and contributing members of society.

69. *We ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2013. However, even before that, we had already embarked on a national roadmap to help persons with disabilities integrate into society.* We implemented our first Enabling Masterplan for persons with disabilities from 2007 to 2011. *We have since developed the Enabling Masterplan (from 2012 to 2016) with extensive public consultation. In each Masterplan, we seek to provide persons with disabilities with targeted assistance to help them live independently in all phases of their lives.* The second Masterplan identifies possible gaps and areas of improvement to better protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

70. Early Intervention. *We have increased subsidies for children at risk of moderate to severe disabilities in the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children.* We are also extending nationwide the Development Support Programme for pre-school children with mild developmental needs.

71. Children with special educational needs. We aim to maximise the potential of every child by placing them in learning environments best suited to their needs. *We seek to integrate children with mild special needs within mainstream schools as far as possible.* Children with moderate to severe special needs can attend special education schools which provide the specialised teaching required. The Government provides additional resources for children with special needs, such as more transport subsidies, financial assistance and infrastructural development support. *Singapore's spending for students in special education schools has increased by 50% in the last five years.*

72. Improvements to Transport Infrastructure. *The Government has improved transport accessibility for persons with disabilities.* Today, all trains, train stations and bus interchanges in Singapore are barrier-free and wheelchair-accessible. 85% of our public buses are already wheelchair-accessible and they will be completely so by 2020. We have also stepped up efforts to make commuter infrastructure such as walkways, taxi stands and road crossings more accessible to the less mobile.

73. Assistance for Adults with Disabilities. *We have expanded the services available to persons with disabilities to help them better integrate into communities and lead meaningful and independent lives.* These include home-based care services and community-based services such as day activity centres.

74. Care-givers play an important role in the lives of persons with disabilities too. *The Government provides assistance to these care-givers to support their efforts.* The Government provides residential care services for those who need long-term care and offers tax reliefs and financial support for families caring for members with disabilities. The Government has also enhanced the Assistive Technology Fund to help persons with disabilities defray the cost of purchasing assistive technology devices.

75. Promotion of Employment. *We have set up a dedicated agency – SG Enable – in 2013 to enhance the employability of and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.* We have also expanded the Workfare Income Supplement and Special Employment Credit Scheme to include persons with disabilities, and their employers, to boost their employment opportunities. The Government encourages employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities through the Open Door Programme, which subsidises the cost employers incur to recruit, train and modify jobs for employees with disabilities.

9. Access to justice

76. Legal Aid. *To improve access to justice, the Government funds civil and criminal legal aid to Singaporeans in need.* For civil cases, the Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) provides aid to Singaporeans who satisfy both a means and a merits test. The LAB currently serves about 10,000 applicants each year. For criminal cases, anyone facing a capital charge can be assigned counsel by the State free-of-charge, regardless of means and nationality. The Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) also provides aid to applicants who satisfy both a means and a merits test. This is run by the Law Society and has received funding from the Government since January 2015. CLAS now aims to help up to 6,000 accused persons each year, a more than tenfold increase from 2014.

77. Alternative Avenues for Legal Assistance. Specialised dispute resolution forums, such as the Tribunal for the Maintenance of Parents, and the complaints process for the Commissioner for Labour to decide salary disputes, have also been established to serve the needs of different groups, particularly those in need. These forums have simplified procedures to allow cases to be heard expeditiously, at much lower cost, and without the need for representation by lawyers. The Courts and other community partners also organise free legal clinics for those in need.

10. Protecting victims of trafficking in persons and preventing trafficking in persons (Recommendations 94.18, 94.19, 95.4 and 96.33)

78. We supported Recommendations 94.18–19, 95.4 and 96.33 because we do not condone any form of Trafficking In Persons (TIP) and we seek to protect victims who fall prey to this scourge.

79. *We launched a National Plan of Action on TIP in 2012.* This adopted a “4P” strategy to combat TIP – Prevention, Prosecution, Protection and Partnership. The Inter-Agency TIP Task Force has been implementing this plan, including securing a dedicated budget to fund various TIP efforts. It continues to work closely with other institutions, civil society and our international partners.

80. Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. *Our Parliament passed the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act in November 2014, which took effect on 1 March 2015.* This Bill was developed by Member of Parliament Mr Christopher de Souza with the support of the TIP Task Force, and after extensive consultations with civil society and the public.

81. This Act is an important additional tool for Singapore to deter and combat TIP. It clarifies the legal regime by providing a formal definition of TIP and prescribing severe penalties in a more targeted manner. Traffickers can be jailed for up to 10 years and fined up to S\$100,000 for the first offence. The Court may also impose caning. We support these strong penalties because they serve as a strong deterrent against this serious crime. For cases involving children, this Act lowers the threshold of proof so that investigations can be initiated more easily.

82. *This Act also supports our collaboration with external law enforcement agencies for cases involving persons trafficked to, or through, Singapore.* Our law enforcement officers are now empowered to investigate intermediaries in the trafficking chain. *This Act also provides measures to protect the welfare of trafficked victims and to encourage the reporting of trafficking or suspected trafficking activity through provisions to protect informers.*

83. Singapore’s recent efforts to combat TIP were positively noted in the June 2015 United Nations Secretary-General’s report on TIP, which highlighted the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and our work with NGOs to help businesses understand the implications of TIP for their supply chain management, among others. Most recently, *Singapore acceded to the UN TIP Protocol in September 2015.* This is an important step towards stronger cooperation with international law enforcement agencies. At the regional level, Singapore has worked closely with other ASEAN countries to conclude an ASEAN Convention to Combat, Prevent and Suppress TIP, which will be accompanied by a regional plan of action. This will improve regional capability to combat TIP and protect its victims.

84. Protection of and assistance for victims of trafficking. Singapore’s approach to TIP is not just about having effective laws and enforcing them. *We also emphasise increasing public awareness of the TIP issue and protecting victims, including removing barriers that may impede them from approaching our authorities for assistance.* Regardless of how a victim of trafficking is identified, once a person claims to be a victim or is identified to be a victim due to the presence of elements of TIP, they will be treated as such. Under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, there are measures to protect victims such as mandatory in-camera court proceedings for child victims and media gag orders for proceedings involving sexual exploitation. *We also extend assistance to all victims. The Government works with a network of NGOs to provide them with food, shelter, medical care, trauma counselling and repatriation assistance.* The movement of victims at shelters is not restricted.

11. **Protection of migrant workers (Recommendations 94.13, 94.14, 94.15, 94.16, 94.17, 96.28, 96.29, 96.30, 96.31, 96.27, 96.32)**

85. Singapore has a sizeable migrant worker population that lives and works in Singapore on temporary contracts. The Government has made strong efforts to safeguard their well-being. *One of our priorities is to ensure that workers enter Singapore on a documented basis as legal status reduces foreign workers' vulnerability.*

86. General Satisfaction. A 2014 survey jointly commissioned by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and an NGO – the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC) – showed that about 90% of the foreign workers surveyed said that they were satisfied with working in Singapore. A similar proportion also said they would recommend Singapore to their friends and relatives as a choice destination for work. Good pay, working and living conditions, and a sense of security were the main reasons cited. More than 70% of workers surveyed planned to renew their contracts with their current employers.

87. Legislative Protections. *All foreign workers who choose to work here are governed and protected under Singapore's rules and regulations.* Like local workers, foreign workers are protected by the Penal Code and employment legislation such as the Employment Act (EA) and Workplace Safety and Health Act (WSHA). *In addition, foreign workers, especially the lower-skilled and lower-income workers, are accorded additional protection* under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) and the Employment Agencies Act (EAA).

88. Salary-Related Protections. Employers are required by law to pay their workers' salaries on time. Excessive deductions from workers' salaries are prohibited. *We amended the Employment Act in 2015 to make it mandatory for employers to issue all workers key employment terms in writing and itemised pay slips.* Additionally, under the EFMA, an In-Principle Approval (IPA) letter with important information, such as the worker's official employer, occupation and salary details must be sent to the worker by the prospective employer before the worker arrives in Singapore. This prevents overseas agents from over-promising salaries for workers, or falsely claiming that workers have to make additional payments to the Singapore authorities. The letter is available in the main native languages of foreign workers. Employers who wish to reduce the worker's basic monthly salary or increase fixed monthly deductions, from what was declared in the IPA letter, must obtain the worker's written consent and inform MOM, before effecting the change.

89. Caps on fees payable to employment agencies. All employment agencies in Singapore must be licensed. *Since 2011, employment agencies are prohibited from collecting fees of more than one month of the worker's salary for each year of service, capped at two months' salary.* Employment agencies must also refund 50% of the agency fees collected to workers whose employment has been prematurely terminated by the employer within the first six months of employment. While fees paid by workers to employment agencies in their home countries are beyond the Singapore Government's jurisdiction, *Singapore shares information collected with the relevant foreign embassies to aid them in combating any malpractices in the workers' countries of origin.*

90. Education and social support for migrant workers. *The Government continues to reach out to all foreign workers to ensure that they understand their employment rights and responsibilities, and know their avenues of recourse.* The multiple channels include: (i) pre-departure materials; (ii) a guidebook given to all foreign workers when they first arrive; and (iii) a module within mandatory safety training courses – all of which are available in the main native languages of workers.

91. Treating every complaint seriously. Foreign workers with a claim or complaint against their employers can seek help from MOM. A dedicated hotline is available to foreign domestic workers (FDW) as well. We receive referrals from NGOs such as the

MWC, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) and Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME). *Each claim is taken seriously and every worker is assigned a case officer to assist him/her. An interpreter is provided where necessary.*

92. Housing and Recreation Needs. The Government is speeding up the construction of dormitories which provide adequate living space and other amenities and recreational facilities to take care of the basic needs of workers. *New legislation – the Foreign Employee Dormitories Act (FEDA) – was enacted in 2015 to ensure that such large dormitories meet the requisite living standards.* Over time, we aim for more workers to be accommodated in such housing facilities.

93. Additional protection for Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs). FDWs have additional protection as they work and live in employers' homes. New FDWs undergo a mandatory settling-in programme to educate them about their employment rights and avenues to seek help. At the same time, new FDW employers have to attend a mandatory Employer's Orientation Programme to learn about their responsibilities.

94. Mandatory rest day for FDWs. Since 1 January 2013, a weekly rest day has been mandatory for FDWs on new and renewed work permits. The law also requires employers to compensate their FDWs with additional pay at a minimum rate of one day's wage, or a replacement rest day, if the FDW chooses not to take his/her rest day.

B. Preserving social harmony

95. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that there can be limits to individual rights in order to maintain public order, as well as to protect the rights of others. Singapore is a multi-religious and multi-racial society. Our diverse society means that we need to balance the right of our people to social harmony with other competing rights.

96. We firmly apply the core principles of meritocracy, secularism and multi-racialism to ensure that the Government adopts an even-handed approach to all communities. We deal decisively against racial chauvinists or religious extremists.

97. We have a strong legal framework comprising the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, the Penal Code, the Sedition Act, and the Public Order Act to deter any individual or 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, the Council scrutinises draft primary and subsidiary legislation to ensure that it does not disadvantage any racial or religious community.

98. The Government also works closely with all community and religious leaders to preserve racial and social harmony in a pragmatic way. At the community level, we try to integrate the different ethnic and religious groups. This includes having policies which ensure that the distribution of people living in public housing mirrors our national ethnic composition, to promote integration and prevent the formation of racial enclaves. We made English the working language in the Government and in schools. We created Group Representation Constituencies so that minorities will always be represented in Parliament.

99. There are many civic organisations that promote social cohesion. The most notable is the Inter Religious Organisation. Formed in 1949, it brings the major faiths together through dialogues and events to promote greater mutual understanding. The Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCC) are other such organisations. Every constituency in Singapore has an IRCC, comprising local community and religious leaders.

1. Safe and secure Singapore

100. Security of person. The Government considers the safety and security of the person to be a fundamental human right, without which other rights cannot genuinely be enjoyed. We are the world's second safest city, after Tokyo (Economist Safe Cities Index 2015). All residents, including women and minorities, can go where they please freely and without fear, in any part of Singapore, at any time of day or night.

101. Robust and fair criminal justice system. The safety and security of Singapore is ensured by a criminal justice system that is robust, fair and serving the needs of all. The cardinal objective of our criminal justice system is to deter crime and protect society against criminals.

102. However, our penal philosophy goes beyond notions of deterrence. Rehabilitation is an important part of our sentencing regime. Where possible, offenders must be given the opportunity to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Prison programmes address inmates' different criminogenic risks and rehabilitation needs. Inmates are also given training and work opportunities in prison. Upon release, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), an organisation that supports the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, will help them with employment. Families and the community also play an important role in supporting inmates in their rehabilitation.

103. Continuous review of the criminal justice system. The Singapore Government continually reviews our criminal justice system in order to ensure that it remains effective and fair. *In 2012, we removed the mandatory death penalty for categories of homicide where there is no intention to kill.* The courts are now given the discretion to order either life imprisonment or capital punishment. *For drug trafficking, importation and exportation cases, where specific, tightly defined conditions are met, the death penalty will no longer be mandatory but be imposed at the discretion of the courts.* This can occur in two situations. First, the offender must have only played the role of courier, and must not have been involved in any other activity related to the supply or distribution of drugs. Second, this discretion will only apply if, having satisfied the first requirement, either the Public Prosecutor must have certified that the offender has assisted the enforcement agencies in disrupting drug trafficking activities within or outside Singapore, or has a mental disability which substantially impairs his mental responsibility for his acts and omissions in relation to the offences committed. These changes seek to ensure that our sentencing framework properly balances the various objectives of the criminal justice system: justice to the victim, justice to society, justice to the accused and mercy in appropriate cases.

2. Protection from harassment

104. Protection from Harassment Act. The Protection from Harassment Act, which came into force in November 2014, is a landmark piece of legislation that was introduced to strengthen protection against harassment in its many forms, which has become a growing concern in Singapore. It provides civil recourse to victims of harassment and strengthens criminal responses to harassment. From sexual harassment, stalking, to bullying in schools or in cyberspace, such behaviour can severely disrupt the lives of many people, including women and children. We decided that omnibus legislation dealing with harassment was needed to send a clear signal that such threats and harassment will not be tolerated.

3. Racial and religious harmony (Recommendations 94.20, 94.21, 94.22, 95.5, 95.6)

105. For the above reasons, Singapore supported Recommendations 94.20–22 and 95.5–6 on continuing further measures to strengthen the harmony among different racial and religious communities.

106. We do not take our existing harmony for granted. Like all countries, we are exposed and vulnerable to extremist ideologies, like the Jihadist ideology of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which are adept at using technology to recruit individuals. In April 2015, we detained a 19-year-old under the Internal Security Act for terrorism-related activities. He was self-radicalised after viewing terrorism propaganda online. He made plans to travel to Syria to join the ISIS and revealed later that he planned to carry out violent attacks in Singapore, including attacking key facilities and assassinating government leaders, if he failed to join ISIS. Three other detentions for similar reasons have since been made, including a 17-year-old in May 2015, as well as an 18-year-old and 29-year-old in September 2015. *Our community leaders have continued to work hard to counter radical ideology, and all communities in Singapore are supporting each other in this effort. The Government has pledged more support to community groups on this issue.*

107. *We established four IRCC Steering Committees in 2014 to encourage youth engagement, strengthen communication and crisis preparedness, and to organise public events to build inter-faith and inter-racial harmony.* These activities help nurture inter-faith understanding and strengthen the community's resilience should any terrorist attack or racial or religious incidents take place.

108. *We set up a S\$5 million Harmony Fund in 2013 to raise awareness of the importance of racial and religious tolerance and understanding, promote appreciation of different cultural practices, deepen interaction among different racial or religious groups, and reduce negative stereotypes or misconceptions about other communities.* The Fund has supported major events such as the annual Harmony Games, a carnival that different religious groups organise and participate in.

109. Singapore confirmed our intention to consider accession to the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) at the last review. We have signed the ICERD and plan to ratify it in 2017.

4. Harmonious relations between neighbours

110. Harmonious relations between residents in a community are an important aspect of quality urban living and preserving social harmony. *In 2015, Singapore implemented the Community Dispute Management Framework.* The Framework has three key aspects: to cultivate good neighbourliness to prevent disputes from occurring; to use mediation as the primary means of resolving disputes (these include informal mediation by neutral third-parties such as grassroots leaders or formal mediation conducted at the Community Mediation Centre); and when all attempts to resolve the conflict have failed, to bring the case to Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals. The Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals will be an avenue of last resort to adjudicate long-standing difficult disputes between neighbours.

5. LGBT community

111. The retention of section 377A of the Penal Code was thoroughly and passionately debated in Parliament in 2007. In 2013, two legal applications were made to challenge the constitutionality of section 377A and the Court of Appeal upheld its constitutionality in both cases. This is a sensitive issue in multi-religious Singapore and the decision to retain section 377A of the Penal Code was a carefully considered and finely balanced decision taken by Parliament. Segments of Singapore society continue to hold strong views against homosexuality for various reasons including religious convictions and moral values. Petitions to repeal section 377A were often met with counter-petitions.

112. While section 377A is retained, the Government does not proactively enforce it. All Singapore citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation, are free to lead their lives and

pursue their activities in their private space without fear of violence or personal insecurity. Members of the LGBT community are also not discriminated against in schools or the workplace. The Government does not discriminate against persons seeking a job in the civil service on the basis of their sexual orientation.

113. We believe that each country should be allowed to deal with such sensitive issues in its own way, taking into account its evolving social and cultural context. Our approach seeks to accommodate the sensitivities of different communities so that there is room for all to exist harmoniously together. We believe this to be a pragmatic and reasonable compromise in the current circumstances.

6. Freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association (Recommendation 96.35)

114. Recommendation 96.35 enjoyed Singapore's partial support as freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association are necessary for a fair and inclusive society. Singaporeans have a constitutionally protected right to freedom of speech and expression. This, however, is not an unqualified right, as acknowledged by the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which also recognises limits to freedom of expression, including those provided by law and those necessary for the respect of the rights and reputations of others, for the protection of national security, public order or public health or morals.

115. *Over the years, we have seen more vigorous debates on policies and politics on various platforms in Singapore, especially in cyberspace and social media.* Singaporeans are also plugged into information and perspectives from all over the world, with 87% of Singapore households having broadband access, and 9 in 10 having access to a smartphone. Singapore is ranked 2nd in the World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index 2014 for leveraging ICTs to promote economic growth and well-being.

116. *The Government welcomes more vibrant public discourse as it encourages greater civic participation in the country.* We conduct public consultation exercises before introducing major policies. Our citizens continue to provide views, criticisms and suggestions on policies and governance issues through the Government feedback unit REACH. *In recent years, Singapore's Prime Minister, Ministers and Members of Parliament have also been actively using social media such as Facebook to engage citizens on various issues and concerns, in addition to traditional forums such as town hall meetings.*

117. While we welcome more open and informed discourse, we remain cognisant of the importance of exercising the freedom of speech in a responsible manner which respects and is sensitive to broader societal interests, especially in cyberspace where information moves much faster, and has greater potential to cause irrevocable deep offence or misunderstanding. We have seen how the pursuit of absolute freedom of expression in other countries can give rise to polarising extremism, racism and xenophobia, which have in turn led not only to acrimony between different groups but tragic bloodshed at times. We want to avoid such incidents in Singapore. Our citizens also demand a high level of civility in our public discourse, especially on such sensitive matters. This is because respect, tolerance and courtesy among different races and religions remain fundamental values for Singaporeans. Similarly, when falsehoods calculated to mislead the public or damage a person's reputation are wilfully made, individuals must have the right to reply or to seek legal recourse.

118. Our approach towards the role of the media is also the same - to encourage responsible free speech and expression. We also believe that the same standards of responsibility, accuracy and decency should be applied across all media. In this spirit, the

Government introduced a new licensing framework for online news sites in June 2013. Online news sites are individually licensable if they report an average of at least one article per week on Singapore's news and current affairs over a continuous period of two months, and are visited by a monthly average of at least 50,000 unique IP addresses from Singapore over the same two months.

119. Nonetheless, the Government continues to maintain a light-touch regulatory approach, and we welcome the presence of more online news sites in Singapore as they enrich public discussion.

120. Singaporeans have a constitutionally protected right to freedom of assembly as long as it is exercised in accordance with the rule of law. From 2012 to 2015, 88 peaceful demonstrations were registered at the Speakers' Corner in Singapore over issues such as the Government's Population White Paper and the CPF. However, the right to assembly must be exercised within the context of broader societal priorities. The Government has a responsibility to preserve public order in our densely populated city-state.

IV. Conclusion

121. Singapore welcomes and supports the UPR process as an opportunity for all States, big or small, to have a conversation with their citizens, CSOs and fellow UN Member States on their achievements and challenges in the area of human rights.

122. We have implemented several new policies and programmes that address many of the recommendations from our first UPR in 2011. In particular, we have made major strides in providing better social protection to our citizens while strengthening our inclusiveness and social harmony.

123. We will build on our progress since the last review in our relentless quest to make Singapore an exceptional nation with a fair and inclusive society. Our fundamentals remain unchanged. Preserving social harmony will remain an absolute priority, even as we continuously strive to meet the changing political, economic and social aspirations of our citizens, and to improve their well-being, through our laws and policies.
