



Oral statement by Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE)

For delivery on 24 June 2016 at the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council

AWARE is a gender equality advocacy group in Singapore. We provide services to thousands of women yearly, including through Singapore's only Sexual Assault Care Centre.

Women's rights are not sufficiently promoted in Singapore, where 19 of 20 full Cabinet members are men. We call for explicit constitutional protection against sex and gender discrimination.

We welcome the possible repeal of marital immunity for rape. We urge its total, unqualified abolition for both rape and sexual abuse of under-16s. We call for the state to proactively investigate and address why sexual violence is chronically underreported.

AWARE urges an end to all forms of state-sanctioned discrimination against single parents. Unmarried parents – overwhelmingly women – are barred from purchasing public housing before the age of 35, and face discriminatory terms of access. For divorced mothers, prohibitive conditions on public rental housing, like a 30-month debarment after sale of the matrimonial flat and an unrealistic income ceiling, cause impoverishment and housing instability.

We call on the state to show respect for the right to family life and the rights of the child by publishing clear and transparent criteria for migrant spouses of Singapore citizens to obtain permanent residence and the right to work. Current arbitrary and opaque processes penalise low-income migrant women, who can be deported in case of spousal abandonment or incarceration. We are especially concerned that migrant women with citizen children lack a clear and unambiguous right to remain with their children in Singapore.

We urge that the fundamental labour protections of the Employment Act be extended to live-in domestic workers. Under current measures, 6 in 10 have no weekly day off. Only half are compensated for this, typically with sums below Employment Act standards. Reports of employer abuse, including overwork and food deprivation, are widespread. We urge an end to this shameful devaluation of care and domestic labour.

Thank you.