



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

Distr.: General
19 September 2007

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Thirty-ninth session

Summary record of the 803rd meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 1 August 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Šimonović, Ms. Gabr, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Third periodic report of Singapore (CEDAW/C/SGP/3; CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/3 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, members of the delegation of Singapore took places at the Committee table.*

2. *A short film on women in Singapore and Government efforts to improve their status was screened.*

3. **Ms. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon** (Singapore) said that the guiding principles of public policy in Singapore since independence had been meritocracy and equal opportunity. Her country's only resource was people; investment in maximizing the potential of all citizens had therefore been a priority. Good governance and economic development had enabled women to make rapid progress and her country to rank highly on the United Nations Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure.

4. Her country had withdrawn its reservation to article 9 of the Convention and amended the relevant article of the Constitution accordingly. As a result, any child of any Singaporean citizen had the right to nationality by descent. Intake quotas limiting admissions of female students to medical school had been removed in 2003. Civil service staff benefit rules had been amended in 2005 to give male and female civil servants equal medical benefits.

5. Reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention would remain, however. The Constitution provided for freedom of religion and protected the rights of the indigenous population. Some provisions of legislation enacted under article 153 were inconsistent with articles 2 and 16 of the Convention. Reservations to article 11 would also remain as it was inconsistent with the armed forces' recruitment policy and the Employment Act. Other legislation and administrative measures existed to protect workers excluded by the Employment Act.

6. The rule of law prevailed in her country, and public confidence in the legal system was strong. No laws had been enacted against gender discrimination, as the principles of equality before the law and equal rights to protection by the law were enshrined in the Constitution. Women's rights were also protected by other legislation, including the Employment Act, the Penal Code and the Women's Charter. The Charter both safeguarded women's rights and established their equality to men in marriage and divorce. Muslim women were protected under the Administration of Muslim Law Act. Moreover, advertising codes and censorship laws protected women from sexual exploitation and stereotyping as objects, and pornography was prohibited as degrading to women and men.

7. Reservations to article 29 would also remain, as the legislative and judicial system was sound and capable of providing legal recourse for women.

8. Health-care standards in her country were high. The health care system catered to the specific needs of women and targeted them with various health education programmes.

9. Education was the sustainable path to equality. Primary education was made compulsory in 2003, in implementation of the second of the Millennium Development Goals. The current female literacy rate was 93 per cent, and women represented almost half of the student population in tertiary education and were well represented in traditionally male subjects.

10. The female labour force participation rate was 54 per cent and the gender wage gap was comparable with that of Greece or France. Her country had ratified the International Labour Organization Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value in 2002 and the Ministry of Manpower sought to ensure the inclusion of an equal remuneration clause in collective agreements. The gender wage gap was becoming narrower for the younger generation. Women had made significant inroads into traditionally male-dominated areas and currently represented 38 per cent of managers, senior officials and professionals and 33 per cent of information technology professionals. Government was encouraging older women to return to the workforce, in view of the aging population and the longevity of women.

11. Women today made up 24 per cent of parliamentarians, as against 6 per cent in 1997, and improvements in the education and professional skills of women suggested that that trend would continue. Women were also increasingly represented at decision-making levels in public service, the judiciary and the diplomatic corps. It was a source of national pride that the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific was a Singaporean woman. Another positive development was the appointment of a woman to the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. The Government supported initiatives to encourage women's participation in decision-making and had recently funded the establishment of the Women's Register, an online database for women to volunteer service to the community and be selected for various leadership positions.

12. By comparison with Western countries, fewer married couples in her country had dual careers. The Government encouraged equal sharing of domestic responsibilities and the involvement of fathers in the upbringing of children. Recent surveys showed that women wanted both to work and to have children, although more were staying single, marrying later and having fewer children. The Government had established an inter-ministerial Committee to encourage women and men to combine work and parenthood. The Government also ensured that childcare was affordable, available and of high quality.

13. The Government was in regular contact with women's groups through women's NGOs, such as the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations, with which it had organized a series of dialogue sessions relating to the Convention since 2000. Issues concerning women were debated in Parliament. Prior to submission to the Committee, periodic reports were presented to the Cabinet for adoption, circulated to women's groups and published on the Internet.

14. Differences between men and women remained in some areas. However, her country's society was dynamic, and laws, policies and practices would evolve accordingly. The most important areas for improvement were women's participation in political life, at the highest levels, as well as narrowing of the gender wage gap, increasing the number of women in the workforce and greater sharing of domestic responsibilities. The outstanding reservations would

remain under consideration, with a view to their full or partial withdrawal at a later date.

15. Singapore was committed to ensuring the progress of women and to its obligations under the Convention. True empowerment of women required change to occur at the level of social norms and mindsets, in addition to legislative reform. Her country would work to bring about such change.

16. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation of Singapore for its introductory statement.

17. **Ms. Gaspard** said that the presence of the inter-ministerial Committee Chairman on the podium provided a good example for other countries to emulate. Singapore's withdrawal of its reservation to article 9 on nationality represented progress, although it was unclear whether the reservation had been removed in part or in full. She requested clarification in this matter and urged that the remaining reservations, namely, to articles 2, 11 and 16, should be withdrawn, as they limited implementation of the Convention. She requested further information on the substance of the discussions that had taken place with the Muslim minority in Singapore and asked whether those discussions would be pursued further. She noted that some Muslim countries, such as Algeria and Morocco, had introduced changes to their family codes pursuant to the Committee's recommendations, encouraged Singapore to follow those examples and suggested that reservations, in particular to article 2, might be lifted progressively.

18. She noted with surprise that the Constitution and the law did not define discrimination or refer to gender equality. She hoped that the Constitution would be revised to protect women from discrimination. She also noted that the Optional Protocol remained to be ratified and asked whether article 20 of the Constitution was scheduled for discussion in the near future.

19. **Ms. Shin** observed that the reasoning supporting the decision to maintain some reservations appeared to offer hope that they might be withdrawn. The Singaporean Constitution stated in its article 12.1 that all were equal before the law. However, the reservations to articles 2 and 16 of the Convention blocked the rights of all women. Reservations to article 2 were incompatible with article 1, which prohibited discrimination and to which no reservations had been made. The Women's Charter did not protect women from discrimination. She requested that the reservation

to article 2 should be withdrawn, as only article 2 (f) referred to religious practices and many Muslim countries had expressed no reservations to the said article. The reservation must be removed in order for the Constitution to be upheld.

20. **Ms. Neubauer** observed that, in order to comply with article 3 of the Convention, States parties must take all appropriate measures, including policy interventions and strategies and legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women and their exercise and enjoyment of human rights on an equal basis with men. That obligation included implementing proactive policy measures and, also, the establishment of effective institutional mechanisms to ensure their successful implementation. The Government of Singapore had taken the first steps by establishing a Women's Desk, within the Ministry of Community Development. However, its location, resources and authority did not allow it to fulfil the Government's commitment to the advancement of women, gender equality and the full implementation of the Convention. She asked whether the Government of Singapore had the political will to support strengthening of the machinery for women in order to ensure that it was effective, and she urged the head of delegation, in conveying the Committee's concerns, to use her influence in that regard.

21. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, recalled that she had been a member of the Committee when it had considered Singapore's previous report and noted the significant progress achieved. While acknowledging the efforts made personally by the head of delegation, she felt that ultimately the institutional framework was of more importance than individual contributors. Thus she stressed the need to have an institutional framework over and above the women's desk and interministerial committee, the more so as Singapore was an advanced country with the human and financial resources needed to set up such a framework. Doing so would help in pursuing the Committee's recommendations and suggestions, including developing policies for women, establishing training programmes for women in the various sectors and for all Government officials, particularly those in the justice sector, and considering the withdrawal of reservations.

22. **Ms. Patten** had some concerns about violence against women, in particular against foreign domestic workers. While acknowledging the introduction of

increased penalties and indeed some very high-profile prosecutions of abusive employers, she wished to know whether the Government planned to adopt any other comprehensive measures to address the underlying factors contributing to abuse, such as isolation in the workplace or economic dependence resulting from heavy recruitment debts. She also asked whether Singapore had provisions in its laws to prosecute employers who confined domestic workers to the workplace, whether consideration was being given to elimination of the security bond, and whether the Government was giving support for the establishment of domestic workers' associations.

23. She was concerned at the lack of a law to address domestic violence. While acknowledging the several measures taken by the Government to combat violence, the various amendments to the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Act, and the commendable establishment of domestic violence coordinators in each police district, she drew attention to general recommendation 19 and asked what were the obstacles to having a specific and comprehensive law to address domestic violence.

24. She enquired about foreign women's access to legal aid and about the accommodation capacity of the three government-funded women's shelters and whether access to them was denied to foreign women married to Singaporean men.

25. She asked whether the Government was considering the enactment of legislation to criminalize marital rape. She had information that recently there had been an initiative to withdraw the marital immunity, but only in three specific situations where the wife was separated from her husband. She urged the Government to remove the immunity completely. She asked for any further information on the database on violence envisaged by the Ministry of Community Development, which would be a very valuable policy-development tool.

26. **Ms. Pimentel** understood that the Government intended to repeal the law criminalizing sodomy between a man and a woman, but that there was no proposal to repeal the similar law concerning homosexual men. Indeed, religious pressure was building to extend the law to outlaw sexual conduct between women. Since a democratic and secular state should refrain from penalizing private sexual relations between consenting adults, she asked how the

Singaporean Government proposed to tackle that issue and protect lesbian women. Noting that the Constitution currently guaranteed freedom from discrimination for single, married and divorced women, she asked how the Government intended to prevent discrimination against lesbian women in the workplace, in access to health services and in society in general.

27. **Ms. Begum** noted that, according to document CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/3/Add.1, the number of applications for Personal Protection Orders and/or Domestic Exclusion Orders relating to cases of spousal violence had been fairly constant from 2003 to 2006 and showed no decline despite the various initiatives taken by the Government. She asked for an explanation of why that was so and of the Government's further plans to address the issue.

28. She also wished to discuss the issue of so-called "mail-order brides", namely women who were brought from various other Asian countries to be married to Singaporean men and were not allowed to work or to stay permanently in Singapore. They were thus only sex slaves, subject to marital rape, treated as slave labour, and forced into prostitution. She asked whether there were national statistics on such marriages, whether those foreign women had access to shelter or medical services, what legal protection they enjoyed and how their human rights were being protected by the Government. Was there any law to control the matchmaking business in Singapore so that foreign women were not trapped by false hopes and deception in an abusive situation?

29. She noted that two thirds of the women with AIDS in Singapore were married, which some experts correlated with the fact that marital rape was not recognized as an offence. How did the Government intend to address that issue?

30. Even though the country report stated that there was no record of trafficking since 2005, it seemed to her that, given its geographical position, Singapore must surely be a transit country for trafficking, including the trafficking of pregnant women as part of the commercial adoption business. Sex tourism was another black spot that needed to be addressed, as was the issue of minors being trafficked into Singapore to be forced into prostitution. Noting that the country had no laws on trafficking and had not yet ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in

Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, she asked what was the Government's policy on those issues.

31. **Ms. Maiolo** noted that Singapore had very severe laws to punish exploitation, prostitution and trafficking, which was positive, but that the Government's responses were a little reticent on measures to suppress those offences. As they constituted a problem all over the world, it was rather surprising that in Singapore there should have been only two prosecutions for forced prostitution in 2004 and none in 2005. She noted that document CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/3/Add.1 stated that the police had been unable to substantiate the offences, but she thought that they were probably not making enough effort to uncover them.

32. She also wished to know why Singapore had not signed the United Nations protocol on trafficking. She recalled that the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences had referred to cases of trafficking of pregnant women so that their babies could be sold after birth. Since the Government had failed to state whether it had prosecuted any such cases, she invited the delegation to respond instead.

33. **Ms. Chutikul** said it was unclear to her whether or not the legal framework of Singapore included a specific law on trafficking. If there was one, she wanted to be reassured that the term "trafficking" was defined clearly and not subsumed into smuggling on the one hand or prostitution on the other hand.

34. She had heard of cases in which trafficked women had been deported instead of protected. She asked whether that was usual, and, if so, why. She knew that women and children were trafficked from the Mekong subregion to Singapore for purposes of prostitution and exploitative labour, and she was aware of reports of human rights violations, such as deprivation of freedom. She asked whether the Government was addressing the situation. What was it doing in terms of labour inspections, of encouraging victims to lodge complaints without fear of deportation, or of disseminating information to the public to encourage them to report such cases?

35. She supposed that Singapore felt that there was no need to ratify the United Nations protocol on trafficking since it considered that the problem did not exist in the country, but suggested that the Government might carry out a small study on whether or not that was really the case. She urged the Government to study the protocol, to look at its definition of trafficking and the measures proposed to combat it, as well as the guidelines of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on a human rights approach to anti-trafficking work.

36. **Ms. Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, noted that many countries had a focal point for dealing with trafficking and asked whether Singapore might do the same. Or did it consider that the problem could be handled by the women's human rights machinery?

37. **Ms. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon** (Singapore) said that the Government was firmly committed to achieving outcomes. It used the Convention's goals as its benchmark, but to achieve the goals it had a different strategy and approach. Also, the Government took the act of ratification very seriously and set itself the goal of 100 per cent enforcement, which meant that all the machinery and resources must be in place before it ratified an international agreement.

38. The reservation to article 9 had been totally withdrawn. There was no discrimination between men and women relating to immigration policy and the children of foreign spouses.

39. Since Singapore was a secular state, all non-Muslim women were covered under civil law. Only the Muslim community was affected by sharia law, which in fact applied only in three areas: marriage, divorce and inheritance. All other matters were regulated for Muslims and non-Muslims alike under civil law.

40. Her ministry was assisted by a Minister within whose remit was the coordination of Muslim affairs. The Muslim community in Singapore was very well organized, perhaps better than its counterparts in China and India. However, she assured the Committee that Singapore would study other countries' approaches and decide which one to follow. It seemed to her that the Muslim community wished to move with the times and to progress along with the rest of society. Some Muslim countries, even those that were Muslim by a large majority, were moving towards a more modern attitude. The Chinese in Singapore totalled 76 per cent,

Malays 15 per cent, Indians 8 per cent and Caucasians about 1 per cent. Under the constitution the Government was obliged to respect the culture, religion and language of minorities. Indeed, in Singapore, a minority language was the national language.

41. As a city state, Singapore would do whatever it took to maintain racial harmony and was determined to ensure that all of its citizens regardless of race or religion were in the mainstream. The Government's inability to withdraw its reservations to articles of the Convention had to be seen in that light.

42. While there was no specific law referring to gender discrimination, careful study of the Women's Charter, the Employment Act and the Penal Code would reveal that all of the matters discussed, including trafficking, were covered. The same applied to homosexuality and marital rape. The Penal Code was the backbone of Singaporean legislation, and all crimes fell under it.

43. The Women's Charter, which was not just about marriage and divorce, had been an aggressive and modern piece of legislation when passed in 1962. Currently, however, the pressure to reform it was growing and was coming increasingly from men, who did not accept that, in the event of divorce, with a woman who earned more than her husband should retain all her earnings, while he had to maintain her and the family or be sent to prison for failure to do so. The Charter's provisions on family violence, introduced a few years previously, also needed to be revisited because violence by women against men was more prevalent.

44. Singapore respected human rights, but it was subjected to contradictory pressures. It upheld morality and human rights very stringently, but in the context of what was best for the majority and for society. With regard to homosexuality, the majority was still quite conservative. Homosexuals were not discriminated against; they had the same right to employment, education or housing as everyone else.

45. The level of staffing of the women's desk had to be seen in terms of the Government's philosophy of being very firmly focused on outcomes. The Government operated at multiple levels, the first being the inter-ministerial committee, which comprised representatives of more than 10 Ministries. All legislation relating to women was referred to the

Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports for comment. At the second level the Government worked with the umbrella organizations such as the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations, the Women Integration Network Council under the People's Association, and the National Trades Union Congress Women's Committee.

46. She agreed that the institutional framework was very important, as was training. Singapore had no resources other than human ones, and thus strove to develop every individual to the fullest. There was a very strong training system in every institution: indeed, some people complained that there was too much training and not enough time for social life.

47. She assured Ms. Patten that the Government took violence very seriously. Even a first-time case of molestation would bring a sentence of six strokes of the cane and jail time.

48. As a small country, Singapore needed to encourage foreign talent. If it wished to be a place where people wanted to come to work, it had to have good legislation, good practice and good employer behaviour. In a survey conducted a few months before, 90 per cent of foreign domestic workers had said that they had good employers, and 70 per cent had said that they would like to return to Singapore in the future.

49. As a small, open country visited by a large number of tourists, Singapore took the problem of HIV/AIDS very seriously. The Ministries of Education and Health had set up a committee to tackle the issue.

50. Trafficking in human beings did not pose a serious problem in Singapore, since controls on migration prevented the movement of illegal migrants into and out of the country. Measures had also been taken to prevent traffickers from using Singapore as a transit country. The intercountry adoption process was fully transparent and was conducted in close coordination with the Government of the source country.

51. Prostitution was not criminalized. However, forcing another person into prostitution was a criminal offence. Responding to a comment made by Ms. Maiolo, she gave assurances that the Singaporean police were highly effective in their work, including investigations of forced prostitution cases. In response to Ms. Chutikul, she said that Singapore participated in dialogue on the problem of trafficking in the context of

the Women's Network of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Her Government would try to expedite the ratification of the United Nations protocol on trafficking. She welcomed the Committee's suggestions that a study on trafficking should be conducted and that a focal point for trafficking issues should be established. Her Government would also study the guidelines on a human rights approach to anti-trafficking work.

52. **Ms. Deena** (Singapore), responding to questions asked by Ms. Gaspard, confirmed that Singapore's reservation to article 9 of the Convention had been withdrawn in full. With regard to the reservation to article 2, she said that the principle of equality of all before the law was enshrined in the Constitution and that all domestic laws were based on that principle. However, the law also protected the interests of indigenous Malays, including their right to practise their religion and to apply sharia law. Those provisions, though discriminatory by the standards of the Convention, were essential in order to preserve the harmony of Singapore's multiracial, multireligious and multicultural society. In that context, it was felt to be impossible to withdraw the reservation to article 2. The reservation, though seemingly wide in scope, was meant to cover only the administration of sharia law by Muslims. Moreover, the sharia applied only to family law and inheritance matters and, even in those areas, the law had been amended to provide for access to civil law in certain circumstances. Sharia law, as applied in Singapore, accorded similar recognition and respect to both sexes in a just and equitable manner. Every effort had been made to incorporate the spirit, if not the letter, of the Convention into the application of sharia law.

53. After careful consideration, the Government had decided against becoming a party to the Optional Protocol at the present time. It preferred to resolve complaints of discrimination at the domestic level — through Government ministries, the courts or Parliament — rather than at the international level. The avenues available under domestic law for resolving complaints had not been used to date.

54. Singapore did not have specific laws to prevent discrimination against women, but, in addition to constitutional guarantees of equality, certain laws provided for special protection for women and the prevention of discrimination in particular areas. There was a need for high-level debate on the issue of

enacting laws that referred specifically to gender-based discrimination. The existing laws were generally felt to be sufficient, but her Government would welcome suggestions on better ways of enforcing them.

55. **Ms. Halimah** (Singapore) said that the Government consulted with the Muslim community on topics such as the reservations to the Convention through the Islamic Religious Council, which was a forum for Muslim community leaders and Muslim NGOs, including an association for young Muslim women. The current view of the Muslim community was that the application of sharia law in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance — the only areas in which it was applied — continued to be relevant. Since its scope of application was narrow, it was not considered to impact adversely on the situation of women.

56. Muslim women had made significant progress in many areas of life, particularly education: there were now more female than male Muslim undergraduates in higher education institutions. In addition, Muslim women were employed in an increasing number of sectors, including the Foreign Service. The pace of modernization posed major challenges to the Muslim community. However, many Muslim NGOs were involved in promoting the empowerment of women and in educating them about Islamic law and the civil legal system, including the provisions of the Convention.

57. A programme had recently been launched for the protection of Muslim women and children against violence. Awareness-raising activities were also planned in order to inform Muslim women about the dialogue with the Committee and to obtain their feedback on what steps could be taken to achieve further progress.

58. **Mr. Chew Hock Yong** (Singapore) said that the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports was the principal ministry with responsibility for the advancement of women. However, in order to raise the profile of gender issues in all Government ministries, the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention had been set up. The issues raised in the present dialogue would be discussed by that Committee so as to ensure follow-up and monitor progress in the implementation of the Convention. The Committee had also been instrumental in securing the withdrawal of the reservation to article 9 of the Convention.

59. He could not provide a specific figure for the resources allocated to gender issues in the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, but efforts were made to leverage resources for the promotion of gender issues in all Ministries. Where Ministries represented on the Inter-Ministry Committee disagreed, there was a mechanism for referring the matter to a higher level, such as the Cabinet, for further discussion.

60. **Ms. Tan Hwee Seh** (Singapore) said that the Women's Desk operated on the basis of the "many helping hands" approach. Its mission was to be a focal point for women in Singapore and to increase the participation of women in all aspects of life. Although it had only two staff members, it was able to work in a flexible manner. It was situated within the Family Policy Unit, whose key responsibility was to evaluate the likely impact on women of all Government policies. The Family Policy Unit was part of the Family Development Group, which had an operating budget of at least \$35 million a year. Other departments within the Family Development Group were responsible for other programmes relevant to the well-being of women, such as efforts to combat stereotypes, promotion of a work-life balance and the provision of childcare and other services for families.

61. The Women's Desk had been closely involved in the organization of the fifth meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Women, hosted by Singapore in 2006, and it would soon be helping to prepare for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings to be held in Singapore in 2009, which would be attended by some 500 women delegates. The Women's Desk also cooperated closely with national women's NGOs. Lastly, it had drawn up a detailed blueprint for the advancement of women focusing on a number of key areas such as leadership, employment, health and the family.

62. **Mr. Keok Tong San** (Singapore) said that the domestic law contained specific provisions prohibiting trafficking in human beings for the purposes of prostitution or other forms of exploitation. Such offences were punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment. There were also plans to enact legislation to protect minors involved in prostitution and to punish those who paid for sexual services from a minor or who organized sex tourism involving the exploitation of minors.

63. Singapore's strategy for tackling the problem of trafficking was enforced principally by the immigration authorities and the police. Measures were in place to detect persons being smuggled across the border and to identify women who might be entering the country for the purposes of prostitution. Most such women were found, when interviewed, to be entering the country voluntarily. Those who were victims of trafficking were interviewed by the police in order to gather information on the traffickers.

64. The police had received some 35 reports in 2006 relating to women working in entertainment venues who were suspected victims of trafficking. However, no evidence had been found in any of those cases to confirm that trafficking had taken place.

65. **Mr. Tai Wei Shyong** (Singapore) said that the rights of foreign workers were protected under the Employment of Foreign Workers Act. In addition, the Penal Code provided that employers who wrongfully confined foreign domestic workers were subject to a fine or a prison sentence of up to three years. Foreign domestic workers had several avenues of redress, including a toll-free hotline and feedback forms which were distributed at the Safety Awareness Course. The Ministry of Manpower also conducted random telephone interviews. Although a number of NGOs worked to protect the interests of foreign workers, none dealt specifically with domestic workers. The Government had no plans to revoke the security bond, since the purpose of the bond was to ensure that employers repatriated foreign workers at the end of their contracts.

66. The Ministry of Manpower employed over 100 labour inspectors to monitor the trafficking of women and girls. Given that Singapore was a small country with open working conditions and that any member of society was free to report suspicions to the police, it was extremely difficult to bring women and girls into the country to work against their will.

67. Singapore had amended the Employment Act in 2004 to raise the minimum working age and had recently ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for employment.

68. **Ms. Tan Hwee Seh** (Singapore) said that prospective adoptive parents were required to sign a statutory declaration stating that the child had not been obtained through child trafficking or other illegal means. The Ministry of Community Development,

Youth and Sports also conducted investigations to ensure that prospective parents were able to provide for the physical, emotional and social needs of the child. The Ministry had not traced any trafficked children to date.

69. **Mr. Chew Hock Yong** (Singapore) said that Singaporean domestic legislation was in line with the Convention and that the Penal Code, the Children and Young Persons Act and the Women's Charter contained provisions to protect women and children against domestic violence. The National Family Violence Networking System, which had been established in 1996, provided multiple access points for victims to obtain help.

70. With respect to HIV/AIDS, the Infectious Diseases Act provided that it was an offence for persons who knew they were HIV-positive to have relations with another person without informing him or her of their status. The offence was punishable by a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or up to two years in prison.

71. **Mr. Keok Tong San** (Singapore) said that Singapore recognized intimacy as a private matter between two consenting adults. In the case of non-consensual intercourse, it was up to the couple to resolve the issue privately within the context of the marriage. Although the Constitution currently provided that men who engaged in non-consensual intercourse had marital immunity, Singapore was gradually taking steps to amend the relevant provisions. The first step was to remove marital immunity in cases where the wife had filed for separation or a protection order. It was expected that the new provision would take effect within the next six months.

72. **Ms. Tan Hwee Seh** (Singapore) said that an inter-agency working group had been set up to assess the business practices of matchmaking agencies and create new advertising guidelines. The working group had examined practices in countries such as Japan and Australia and had found that matchmaking agencies in those countries offered similar services. Although the agencies could not be regulated by the Government owing to practical difficulties, the working group would continue to closely monitor the situation.

73. **Mr. Keok Tong San** (Singapore) said that the provision criminalizing sodomy between men and women would not be repealed; however, the wording of the provision would be amended to refer to "sexual

assault by penetration”, and the penalty for such acts would be increased. With respect to the criminalization of lesbianism, he said that Singapore did not wish homosexuality to enter mainstream society.

74. **Ms. Simms** observed that Singapore faced a basic ideological challenge in the recognition of human rights. In order to preserve harmony in its multicultural society, the Government was obliged to maintain certain discriminatory policies and practices. Unfortunately, that discrimination targeted women.

75. She was pleased that efforts were being made to provide counselling to women victims of violence; however, she would appreciate statistics on the number of men who had been imprisoned for committing such acts.

76. **Ms. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon** (Singapore) said that Muslim women living under sharia law did not view themselves as victims of discrimination. Regarding the issue of marital rape, she observed that the majority of people still considered sexual issues to be private and did not wish marital rape to be included in the Penal Code.

77. **Mr. Chew Hock Yong** (Singapore) said that there were no available data on the number of men who had been imprisoned for acts of violence against women. However, in 2006, there had been 63 cases of rape, 913 cases of outrage against modesty and 60 cases of serious bodily harm.

Articles 7 to 9

78. **Ms. Neubauer** observed that Singapore had a complicated system for electing Parliamentary representatives and that the quota system might not be appropriate. She expressed disappointment at the low number of women in high-ranking positions in both the civil and the diplomatic service and requested further information on the selection process and the use of gender-sensitive criteria. Drawing the delegation’s attention to general recommendations 23 and 25, she pointed out that temporary special measures such as preferential treatment could be used instead of a quota system to increase female representation.

79. **Ms. Shin** said that there appeared to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the Convention with respect to equality and the principle of non-discrimination. She reiterated that the term “equality” did not simply mean “equal opportunities

and standards” and that, for the purposes of the Convention, the term “discrimination” included both direct and indirect discrimination. She urged the delegation to consider using temporary special measures to balance the power structure between men and women in Singaporean society and achieve real equality for women.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.