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Media Release

SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY MUHAMMAD FAISHAL IBRAHIM REITERATES SINGAPORE'S COMMITMENT TO ENHANCE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

1. Senior Parliamentary Secretary (SPS) for Social and Family Development, Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, led the Singapore delegation to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women and the Economy Forum (WEF) in La Serena, Chile. The APEC-WEF is an annual meeting of leaders from the public, private, non-government and academic sectors to discuss the empowerment of women across APEC economies.
2. This year, Singapore's delegation comprised eight representatives from the Government, civil society and private sectors, signaling strong partnership and collaboration across various sectors in advancing women's economic empowerment. The delegation included **Mrs Laura Hwang**, Singapore's Representative for women's rights on the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), **Ms Lavinia Thanapathy**, 3rd Vice-President from Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) and **Ms Teresa Teo**, member of Business and Professional Association for Women (Third Chapter).
3. In his address at the High Level Policy Dialogue (4 October), SPS Faishal highlighted Singapore's experience in promoting an enabling environment for women in Singapore to maximise their economic potential and be empowered to manage family and career aspirations. For example, Singaporean girls and boys are given equal access to quality and affordable higher education. Singapore also promotes flexible work arrangements and shared parental responsibilities to help women remain in the workforce while juggling family responsibilities. SPS also talked about Singapore's initiatives to improve women's representation on boards (See **Annex A** for SPS's address).
4. SPS Faishal joined a panel discussion with public and private representatives from Chile on reducing the digital gender gap and promoting more women in STEM. During the dialogue, SPS shared about Singapore's focus on digital inclusion to ensure that all Singaporeans have access to technology, the ability to seize the opportunities and reap benefits of technology in everyday living. For example, girls and boys are exposed to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in school. The SkillsFuture Movement also provides Singaporeans with opportunities to learn more skills after they enter the workforce and develop to their fullest potential.
5. Ms Lavinia Thanapathy, 3rd Vice-President from Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), was part of the delegation as a civil society



representative. She mentioned, “In Singapore, the government is working with groups like the SCWO to unlock the full economic potential of women. I am delighted to participate in the APEC WEF conference alongside SPS and fellow delegates from Singapore. This platform is an opportunity for us to share our successes and listen for ideas from other nations to create greater equity for women to impact our economic growth positively”.

**ISSUED BY
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About APEC-WEF

The APEC-WEF is an annual meeting of leaders from the public, private, non-government and academic sectors to discuss and exchange views on empowerment of women across APEC economics.

This year, the Government of Chile hosted APEC-WEF, with the theme “Advancing the inclusion of women in the economy”. There were 4 cascading priorities: (i) Increasing the participation of women in non-traditional sectors; (ii) Bridging the digital literacy gender gap; (iii) Advancing women’s economic empowerment through data; and (iv) The endorsement of the Santiago Roadmap on Women and Inclusive Growth, which seeks to advance women’s economic participation in the APEC region by 2030.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim Reiterates Singapore's Commitment to Enhance Women's Economic Participation

**ANNEX A – SPS ADDRESS AT HIGH LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE ON WOMEN
AND THE ECONOMY ON 4 OCT 2019, LA SERENA, CHILE**

Theme: Advancing the Inclusion of Women in the Economy

Honourable Chair
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. A very good afternoon. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to thank the Government of Chile for organising the APEC Women and the Economy Forum and extend our appreciation for your warm hospitality.
2. Today, we live in an era of rapid technological advancements that will continue to transform the way we live and work. Economies need to keep up with the pace of change by building their workforce capabilities. Amidst the disruptions that the digital age brings, it also brings along bountiful opportunities. I believe that this Forum will spur further action by APEC economies to advance women's economic empowerment.
3. We believe in the advancement and active participation of our women in Singapore's development. Singapore remains committed to advancing our women's economic participation at all levels. Our core principle of meritocracy means that equal opportunities are available to both men and women.
4. Today, we have a healthy employment situation for Singaporean women. Our female employment rate for those aged 25 to 64 has risen from 65% in 2008 to 72% in 2018. We are ranked 7th against 36 OECD countries for women in full-time employment. However, we note that women may still face barriers to remain or re-enter the workforce. Allow me to share Singapore's experience in promoting an enabling environment for our women to maximise their economic potential.

Equal opportunities and access to education

5. Recognising that education is a key enabler, all Singaporean girls and boys have equal access to quality higher education at highly subsidised rates. Today, women made up 48% and 50% of the full-time student enrolment at our polytechnics and universities respectively.
6. Singapore encourages more students to consider careers in STEM. For example, Applied Learning Programmes in STEM enable secondary school students to apply STEM knowledge to address real-world problems and interact with industry

professionals. We hope to gradually dismantle gender stereotypes by exposing both girls and boys to STEM careers at a young age.

Empowering women with choices through flexible work arrangements

7. Women play multiple roles in society. Some may face challenges juggling their career and family. Singapore's approach is to empower women with choices to pursue both family and career aspirations.

8. To do this, we promote more flexible work arrangements (or in short, FWAs) to help women remain in the workforce while balancing family responsibilities. Today, more than 9 in 10 employees work in companies with some form of work flexibility such as telecommuting or job-sharing. We want to do more. Recently, we increased the budget for a grant to incentivise companies to adopt FWAs, from \$30 million to \$100 million.

Encouraging shared parental responsibilities

9. It is not easy to change cultural norms and gender roles, but Singapore is taking steps to promote a more balanced share of parental responsibilities. For example, fathers can now take up to 8 weeks of leave to care for their new-born children. The take-up of paternity leave has been encouraging, increasing from 37% in 2014 to 53% in 2017. We also work closely with community partners such as Families for Life and Centre for Fathering to encourage active fathering and parenting.

Advancing women's representation on boards

10. Singapore is also proactively making strides to improve women's representation on boards. Earlier this year, the Government formed the Council of Board Diversity – with the aim of increasing women representation on boards, not just in the private sectors, but also in the people and public sectors. This is further complemented by ground-up effort such as Singapore Council of Women's Organisation's 'BoardAgender' initiative. 'BoardAgender' advocates for gender-balanced boards through meaningful dialogues.

11. As at June 2019, women held 15.7% of board seats in Singapore's top 100-listed companies. It is encouraging to see that the percentage of women on boards has doubled since 2014. We have made some headway, but like other economies, there is more that we can do, both at the national level, and as part of the APEC. We wish to learn from other economies such as Malaysia, Australia and United States¹ who have made significant progress in this area.

¹ The percentage of Women on Boards for the US is 24.0% (17 May 2018); Australia is 28.4% (Oct 2018); and Malaysia is at 23.7% (end 2018).

Concluding Remarks

12. This Forum has shown an impressive report on the progress of women in the various economies. Congratulations to all!

13. Women are described as holding up half the sky, but with the progress of APEC women, we look forward to a new age of flying through the skies, remembering always that a plane requires two wings, women and men to soar together. Thank you.