



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Sixty-eighth session**

Summary record of the 1535th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 25 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

Contents

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

Fifth periodic report of Singapore (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

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

Fifth periodic report of Singapore (continued) (CEDAW/C/SGP/5; CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/5 and CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/5/Add.1)

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

Articles 10 to 14

2. **Mr. Bergby** said that he wished to know what measures were planned to encourage young women to study engineering and other technical fields and to support them when they responded positively to that encouragement. In addition, he wished to know what steps were being considered or had been taken to ensure that matters pertaining to gender equality were included in educational curricula, starting in the earliest years of school.

3. Sex education in the State party apparently promoted abstinence before marriage as the best course of action for teenagers, an approach that could lead to the stigmatization of sexual relations outside marriage. He therefore wondered whether the State party intended to treat non-marital sex and same-sex activity as neutral personal choices and whether the Ministry of Education had any plans to ensure that students were given more information on safer sex, contraceptives, sexual violence and consent. He also wondered whether the State party had any plans to abolish the exception that allowed Muslim girls under the age of 18 years to marry. The rate at which girls dropped out of secondary school, at 0.7 per cent, was very low, but it would be interesting to know whether it was in any way connected to that exception in the law.

4. It would also be interesting to know whether the State party made efforts to ensure that its large population of foreign domestic workers, most of them women, had access to adult education. He asked whether the State party intended to make the Employer Orientation Programme compulsory not only for first-time employers of foreign domestic workers but also for those who were not employing such workers for the first time. Similarly, he wished to know whether the State party had plans to extend the reach of the Settling-In Programme so that it covered both first-time and non-first time foreign domestic workers.

5. **Ms. Haidar**, commending the State party for its withdrawal of its reservation to article 11 (1) of the Convention, and also for the increase in the workforce participation rate of working-age women and for a number of initiatives that had been taken to reconcile work and family life, said that the Committee was nonetheless concerned that the previous recommendations that it had made with regard to discrimination against women in the field of employment had not been fully addressed. In that connection, it would be interesting to know whether the delegation could provide any examples of cases of discrimination in employment in which women had been awarded judgments and what plans had been made to narrow the persistent gender pay gap. She also wondered whether Singapore had any plans to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

6. She would welcome a comment from the delegation on the shortcomings of the otherwise commendable Protection from Harassment Act, under which it was evidently both complex and costly to seek civil remedies, and what could be done to address those shortcomings. In addition, she asked why the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act did not apply as a whole to foreign domestic workers, who, for instance, were unable to move freely from one employer to another, and whether there were any plans to change the law. The delegation could also indicate, as suggested by Mr. Bergby, whether any plans had been made to provide foreign domestic workers with additional opportunities for skills and other training.

7. **Ms. Narain** said that she wished to know why the State party had made no progress towards repealing the law requiring foreign domestic workers to be deported on grounds of pregnancy or the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS, as the Committee had recommended in its previous concluding observations. In addition, she wondered what steps were taken to ensure that foreign domestic workers had access to health care, in particular non-surgical care, and whether consideration could be given to subsidizing the treatment of the State party's migrant workers, female domestic workers in particular, in its public hospitals. She would welcome a comment on the financing of health-care services for older women, in the form of home visits, for example. An indication of whether any measures were being taken to enhance the sensitivity with which health-care providers treated lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and to prevent such women from being denied health care would also be welcome.

8. **Ms. Binte Irwan** (Singapore) said that Muslim girls under the age of 18 were authorized to marry only in special circumstances. The permission of a qadi, a religious official appointed by the President to assess, solemnize and register a Muslim marriage, was required and his decision to grant such permission was based on the prospective bride's social situation and her readiness to marry. In practice, however, marriages involving such girls were rare. They had accounted for 0.4 per cent of all marriages in 2016, down from 0.8 per cent in 2010.

9. Since the country's previous appearance before the Committee, the Administration of Muslim Law Act had been amended to make attendance at marriage preparation programmes mandatory for couples in which either prospective spouse was under the age of 21 years. Parental consent was also required in those cases. The Committee's concern that early marriage could interfere with girls' education would be taken into consideration in the country's ongoing efforts to review the Administration of Muslim Law Act.

10. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore) said that a number of education and training opportunities offered by a range of institutions, including Singaporean government agencies, foreign embassies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were available to foreign domestic workers. In most cases, such as with the caregiver and health-care training offered by the Agency for Integrated Care, course fees were covered by grants awarded to employers. Foreign domestic workers could also take courses on how to manage their money or how to start a business, thereby preparing them for their return to their home countries.

11. Employers who had previously employed foreign domestic workers were familiar with the basics of relevant labour law and were thus not required to attend the training sessions meant for first-time employers. If, however, veteran employers went through large numbers of such workers, they could be required to go through retraining. The Settling-In Programme, for its part, had been introduced in 2013. In the Programme, new foreign domestic workers learned about their rights and responsibilities. They learned, for instance, how to ask for help, how much food they were entitled to or even how to handle such potentially daunting tasks as hanging clothes out to dry in a high-rise environment that might be unfamiliar to them. The Programme was for new arrivals only, as other foreign domestic workers had been in the country long enough to have gained familiarity with the Singaporean system.

12. All foreign domestic workers with valid claims were allowed to change employers. Such changes could not be made entirely freely, but that did not mean that they could not be made at all. Workers could ask their employers for permission to change jobs. The courses offered as part of the Settling-In Programme addressed the ways that foreign domestic workers could approach their employers if they felt that they could not cope, if they wished to resign or if they wished to change jobs.

13. Foreign domestic workers were not, as was sometimes believed, slaves. They were allowed to terminate their employment contracts, and employers, given sufficient notice, were generally willing to allow them to seek new employment in the country's thriving transfer market. Employers who failed to pay their employees on time were punished. Employment agencies that flouted the law were subject to enhanced penalties.

14. Turning to a related issue raised by the Committee, she said that any migrant worker who was denied health care because his or her employer refused to pay for it could appeal

to the authorities, who would penalize the employer and allow the worker to change jobs. As part of the Settling-In Programme, foreign domestic workers were given contact information for the Ministry of Manpower, embassies and NGOs, to which they could turn for help.

15. As it was very small — only slightly larger than Lake Geneva — Singapore had strict immigration laws. Foreign domestic workers were admitted to the country to work and they arrived knowing full well that it had strict rules about pregnancy.

16. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that mandatory HIV/AIDS testing for foreign domestic workers had been instituted to protect the residents of Singapore, which was a densely populated city state with a low HIV infection rate.

17. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that the Protection from Harassment Act, which had entered into force relatively recently, had had a positive impact on the provision of recourse to victims of harassment. The early figures were heartening. Between November 2014 and May 2017, for instance, 320 complainants had submitted applications for protection orders under the Act. Measures had been taken to assist victims for whom it was difficult to apply for such orders. Victims could seek aid from the Legal Aid Bureau or apply to the courts for waivers of filing fees. In addition, personnel at the State Courts had been trained to help petitioners without lawyers submit their applications. Violations of protection orders were punishable by a fine or imprisonment. Victims could file police reports or magistrate's complaints and action would be taken.

18. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore) said that the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, which had been set up by employers, trade unions and the Government, made considerable efforts to combat the attitudes that often led to discrimination in the workplace. The approach taken to hiring and promotion by employers in Singapore was meritocratic. The Ministry of Manpower ensured that employers who discriminated against women were punished.

19. Singapore took a conservative approach to ratifying international instruments, as it wished to ensure that it could comply with them in letter and in spirit. Although it had not yet ratified ILO Convention No. 111 and ILO Convention No. 189, it was committed to relying on its laws to address workplace discrimination and ensure that domestic workers could exercise their rights.

20. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that non-legislative measures were used to prevent discrimination in Singapore and the number of complaints made on the grounds of racial and religious discrimination was very low.

21. Health-care financing was provided through the so-called 3M system, which comprised Medisave, which helped individuals to save money to pay for medical bills, Medishield Life, which was a medical insurance scheme, and Medifund, which was intended to enable the poorest members of society to obtain health care. The system enabled hospitalized citizens to stay in wards of greater or lesser quality, depending on their resources. Patients staying in more expensive wards were expected to contribute to the cost themselves. Persons with disabilities were entitled to receive monthly benefits and plans were in place to review the provision of health-care financing in order to improve the support provided to older persons. The Health Promotion Board also implemented measures to prevent people from falling ill.

22. In addition to providing financial support to persons who were unwell, the Government had established centres where individuals could undergo health tests and participate in programmes of activities intended to help them maintain a good state of mental and physical health. Informal structures also existed through which citizens cared for each other on a voluntary basis.

23. Sex education in schools was taught through citizenship education, in which pupils were taught to respect all persons, irrespective of their race, age, religion or gender. The Ministry of Education aimed to help pupils to develop positive social and emotional skills and to enjoy healthy relationships. Various programmes had been established that promoted family values and abstinence before marriage and taught pupils about sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy and the use of contraception. The Ministry had found that

such programmes were suited to the context of Singapore and were positively viewed by pupils.

24. Measures were taken to ensure that gender stereotypes were not perpetuated in the education system. All students studied the full range of subjects, including mathematics and science. In secondary and higher education establishments, they received career guidance in which they learned about the opportunities available in all areas, including engineering and science. Students were encouraged to study the subjects that they liked best, as that was the best guarantee of their happiness and success. The evidence indicated that growing numbers of girls and women were opting to choose subjects such as science and engineering.

25. Entry to higher education depended not only on examination results but also on students' aptitude, as measured by specifically developed assessment methods.

26. Individuals who subscribed to insurance policies were entitled to nominate their beneficiaries, who could include lesbian, bisexual, gay and transsexual persons.

27. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore), responding to a question about the gender pay gap, said that the median wages of both men and women had increased by 5 per cent over the previous 10 years. The wage gap between men and women had arisen mainly because women were more likely to stop working in order to become caregivers. The Government had recently established the tripartite standard on flexible working arrangements in order to help women remain in the workforce and to encourage non-working mothers to return to it. Currently, 67 per cent of companies provided formal flexible working arrangements, while a number of others provided ad hoc arrangements. Women were provided with subsidized training to ensure that they had the skills required to return to the workforce. The Government also worked with trade unions on re-employment programmes for women.

28. **Ms. Manalo** said that, according to government figures, there were approximately 240,000 female migrant domestic workers in the State party. They were not covered by the Employment Act, with the result that they were prevented from enjoying basic rights, such as the right to public holidays, paid sick leave, maternity leave and overtime pay. On average, migrant domestic workers worked over 13 hours per day, while many worked between 16 and 18 hours. Although employers were required to grant domestic workers one day of rest per week, many failed to do so. The Committee was concerned that migrant domestic workers, including women and girls, were required by law to live with their employers, which made them especially vulnerable. In recent years, a number of cases of migrant workers being beaten, killed and sexually and verbally abused had been reported.

29. Despite the fact that, under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, employment agencies and employers were forbidden to retain workers' identity documents, employers often confiscated such documents from workers. Owing to the vagueness of the regulations governing accommodation standards, live-in female domestic workers often found themselves sleeping in kitchens, storerooms and living rooms. Employers could prevent workers from changing jobs by refusing to consent to a transfer and could terminate workers' contracts, without just cause, at any time.

30. All female migrant workers were required to take a medical examination for pregnancy and infectious diseases within 14 days of their arrival in the State party and at periodic intervals during their employment. According to reports received by the Committee, such workers sometimes resorted to taking abortion drugs to terminate their pregnancies in order to avoid being deported. Furthermore, they were prevented from marrying Singaporean citizens or permanent residents without the permission of the Ministry of Manpower. Foreign wives who had suffered abuse feared that their Singaporean husbands would stop sponsoring their Social Visit Passes if they reported the abuse, leaving them with no choice but to return to their home countries, leaving their children behind.

31. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she wished to know whether there were any legal restrictions on migrant workers' right to organize trade unions.

32. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know whether the tripartite mechanism mentioned earlier could be seen as a dispute resolution mechanism or whether its function was simply to improve working conditions. If it served to resolve disputes, she would welcome details of the type and number of cases that it had addressed.

33. With regard to the delegation's assertion that migrant domestic workers could change jobs if they had good reason to do so, she asked what constituted a good reason and whether such workers knew what procedure to follow if they wished to change jobs.

34. Noting that the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act often made reference to the Employment Act, which did not apply to domestic workers, she said that she would welcome more information on how the two Acts were applied in relation to the rights of such workers.

35. Lastly, she wished to point out that the State party's decision not to ratify the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Discrimination) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) made it even more important for the State party to enact comprehensive domestic legislation that protected workers against discrimination.

36. **Mr. Bergby** said that he wished to know why foreign domestic workers were not covered by the Employment Act and what problems the Government would encounter if it took steps to ensure that such workers were covered by that Act.

37. He asked how workers would be able to find the time to pursue adult education courses when they were given the possibility of forgoing their rest days in exchange for monetary payment. He wished to know whether the possibility of exchanging rest days for payment was available only to Philippine workers or also to workers from other States.

38. He urged the State party to take steps to ensure that subjects such as engineering were made appealing to women and girls.

39. **Ms. Narain** said that information had not yet been provided on whether lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer or questioning women had access to health-care services.

40. **Ms. Lim** (Singapore) said that the Employment Act did not discriminate on grounds of nationality or gender. Certain groups of workers, including domestic workers, were not covered by the Act, regardless of whether they were Singaporean nationals or not. The Act did not apply to domestic workers because the nature of their working days made it difficult to measure the number of hours that they worked. Although certain provisions of the Employment Act did not apply to domestic workers, the protection that they were afforded under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act gave them comprehensive protection that extended to areas not covered by the Employment Act, including health care, accommodation and food. In view of the fact that around 240,000 foreign domestic workers were resident in Singapore, it was significant that only 30 cases of abuse against such workers were reported every year.

41. Foreign domestic workers had acquired the right to enjoy rest days in 2013. As such workers were required to renew their work passes every two years, they were currently all entitled to take rest days. A government survey of 1,000 domestic workers had indicated that the number of workers who enjoyed at least one rest day had risen from 53 per cent in 2010 to 97.5 per cent in 2015.

42. In order to monitor the conditions of foreign domestic workers, the Government had established a scheme whereby a certain number of such workers were interviewed about their conditions without their employers being present. The interviews were held with workers who had been in their posts for between three and six months.

43. Migrant workers had the right to join and be represented by a trade union. Non-nationals could form and lead trade unions, with authorization from the Ministry of Manpower.

44. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women enjoyed equal access to health-care services.

45. A report issued around six months earlier had indicated that increasing numbers of women were becoming research scientists and engineers. In fact, a higher percentage of women were employed in those professions in Singapore than in many developed countries.

46. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that she wished to know whether the State party possessed information on whether, and to what extent, foreign

domestic workers enjoyed the right to take rest days, annual leave and other benefits mentioned by the Committee.

47. **Ms. Bethel** said that article 13 of the Convention addressed economic structures and policies that generated or perpetuated women's inequality or that hindered women's access to resources such as family benefits, bank loans, mortgages and financial or tax credits. In view of the fact that the Income Tax Act had been amended in 2010 to extend tax relief to married women taxpayers, she asked what conditions, aside from being married, women needed to fulfil in order to have access to tax relief; whether the qualifying requirements for tax relief applied equally to men and women; whether the gender perspective had been considered in relation to unpaid care and other domestic work performed by women; whether the State party would consider introducing tax relief for unmarried women taxpayers with families to support; whether a mechanism existed that enabled women to file a formal complaint if they felt they had been unfairly treated; and whether the State party held data, disaggregated by sex and ethnicity, on the disbursement of such tax relief.

48. Noting that the State party had established the 2014 Pioneer Generation Package to address the health-care needs of persons born on or before 31 December 1949, she asked whether the health-care subsidy provided through that Package was paid on a regular basis or whether it was a one-off payment; whether, in formulating the Package, the State party had consulted women aged over 65 years in order to assess their health-care needs; whether any studies incorporating a gender perspective had been conducted to determine whether the subsidy met the health-care needs of older women; and whether any data on that initiative, disaggregated by sex and ethnicity, was available. She wondered whether the initiative would be maintained once the people to whom it had originally applied had died.

49. She asked whether the Silver Support Scheme of 2016, which provided quarterly payments of between S\$ 300 and S\$ 750 to supplement the retirement incomes of low-income persons aged 65 years and older, incorporated a gender perspective that took into account the unpaid care work that women often carried out during and after their time in paid employment; whether any data on the Scheme, disaggregated by sex and ethnicity, were available; and whether the State party would consider extending the schemes mentioned above, and providing a matched savings scheme through the Central Provident Fund, to ensure that women aged 65 years and over had adequate savings, irrespective of their year of birth or naturalization. She would welcome further information on whether women living in extended families received lower payments under the Silver Support Scheme.

50. She wished to know whether tax relief or financial support was extended to women with disabilities and whether such women had been consulted; what measures, if any, were in place to empower women, particularly ethnic Malay women, in the areas of business and entrepreneurship; and whether it was the case that widowed and single women were not given the same access to State housing as married couples.

51. International financial centres were increasingly being required by human rights bodies to account for the impact that their domestic corporate policies had abroad in terms of loss of public revenues that could be used to improve the human rights situation in other countries. That was an important governance issue and, as such, was one that would merit the involvement of civil society. She asked whether the State party would consider undertaking assessments of the extraterritorial impacts of its financial secrecy and its policies and rules regarding corporate reporting and taxation, tax avoidance and revenue mobilization abroad, particularly in developing countries, where the loss of public revenue owing to cross-border tax avoidance or evasion jeopardized women's rights and gender equality.

52. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that the Government would give the issue further consideration.

53. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she wished to draw attention to the plight of several groups of women in vulnerable situations in the State party. She would be grateful for details of the time frame for improving the residence status of foreign spouses of Singaporean citizens. Given that the legislative and administrative frameworks of the State party effectively institutionalized discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and

included media censorship of any attempts to promote a same-sex lifestyle as normal, she wished to know what steps the State party would take to promote the rights of all women, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Expressing concern about the situation of older women who had been caregivers or had occupied low-paid jobs and were therefore entitled to a low retirement pension, she asked what steps were being taken to improve their economic situation.

54. She asked whether the State party planned to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. It would be useful to know whether the State party intended to establish national legislation and procedures relating to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, in line with international standards, and to ensure that the specific needs of women and girls seeking international protection were addressed.

55. **Mr. Goh** (Singapore) said that the national policy on the rights of foreign spouses had been designed to facilitate their stay in Singapore. In each case, the authorities took the time to verify the stability of the marriage, taking into account its duration, whether the couple had children and the ability of the Singaporean spouse to support the family financially, before considering the foreign spouse for permanent residence or citizenship. Drawing attention to the information provided in paragraphs 16.31 and 16.32 of the periodic report on the Long-Term Visit Pass scheme, he highlighted the health-care benefits available to foreign spouses. Of the 18,000 applications to work received by the Ministry of Manpower from foreign spouses in 2016 alone, over 95 per cent had been approved, the vast majority within only two weeks.

56. Underscoring the information provided in paragraph 94 of the replies to the list of issues, he said that the authorities respected the principle of non-refoulement and, in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, arranged for refugees and asylum seekers to travel safely to a third country. Law enforcement officers received training in dealing appropriately with female refugees and asylum seekers.

57. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** (Singapore) said that the income tax policy had been designed to promote parenthood within marriage, which was the prevailing social norm valued by Singaporean society. There were therefore no plans to extend the benefits available to married parents to those who were unmarried. Nevertheless, single and unmarried parents could apply to the Housing and Development Board, which considered all applications on a case-by-case basis; in many cases, flexibility was exercised and those families were allocated social housing.

58. Under the Pioneer Generation Package, many older citizens were eligible for health-care subsidies and premiums. Older people with moderate to severe disabilities could receive cash assistance to help with the costs of long-term care relating to their disability. Under all such schemes, the benefits were valid for life and aimed to acknowledge the contributions that the recipients had made to Singaporean society. There were additional schemes to assist older people who required more help, such as the Silver Support Scheme, which provided financial assistance to the bottom 30 per cent of Singaporeans aged 65 years and above who had earned low wages in the past and currently had little or no family support. Many women who had been caregivers and therefore received little from the Central Provident Fund were significant beneficiaries of that scheme. The various Community Care (ComCare) assistance schemes provided monthly social assistance payments to those living in poverty, and short- to medium-term support was available for unemployed persons. The Government recognized that there was no easy way to develop a matrix to measure accurately who should qualify for which benefits. It had developed its matrix over time and continued to monitor it in order to ensure that older people with the lowest incomes truly benefited from social welfare.

59. **Ms. Hayashi** asked whether the State party had contemplated initiating a dialogue with children's rights organizations on the issue of introducing a blanket ban on corporal punishment of all children under the age of 18, given that both the Penal Code and the Women's Charter permitted the use of force to discipline children in the home.

60. **Ms. Tan Yi-Lui** (Singapore) said that the Government would consider the issue.

Articles 15 and 16

61. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that she wished to draw attention to the situation of Muslim women in the State party, who did not enjoy their human rights as enshrined in the Convention, and indeed were often unaware of those rights. They were discriminated against in law, under the Administration of Muslim Law Act, and in practice. She recommended that the State party take into account the experiences of other States parties to the Convention that had similar social, cultural and religious backgrounds and legal systems, many of which had introduced special provisions or amended standards of legal interpretation or family law provisions in order to ensure that all women within their territories enjoyed the rights contained in the Convention.

62. She asked what steps the State party planned to take in order to ensure an absolute prohibition of polygamous marriage and the male guardianship system within its territory. She wished to know what measures it planned to implement in order to put a stop to child, early and forced marriage in law and in practice, with no exceptions. It would be useful to know when Muslim women in the State party would have the same inheritance rights as men and whether there were plans to revise the divorce rights of Muslim women in the State party. Additional information on when the State party would lift its remaining reservations to the Convention would also be useful.

63. **Mr. Bin Mohd Nasir** (Singapore) said that, while the Government was committed to examining the practice of Muslim law, it did so in a progressive way and with full respect for the long history of the school of Muslim jurisprudence in Singapore. With regard to inheritance, while classic Islamic law apportioned men a greater share than women, other options on the disposition of property were available in Singapore, within Muslim law, allowing women to obtain an equal share, and in some cases a greater share than male beneficiaries. On the issue of the male guardianship system, under which women were required to obtain permission to marry from their legal guardian, he said that, if the qadi or the Registry of Muslim Marriages found that a guardian's objection to a marriage registration was unsatisfactory or unreasonable, the marriage would be allowed to proceed. The requirements for entering into a polygamous marriage were extremely stringent, as the authorities recognized the need for equal treatment. There were very few polygamous marriages in Singapore.

64. **Ms. Binte Irwan** (Singapore) said that the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore prioritized the spirit of the inheritance law, which was to seek justice and protect the beneficiaries. In both its advice to individuals and its awareness-raising efforts, the Council urged all parties in inheritance cases to uphold the rights of both female and male beneficiaries. The Fatwa Committee had issued several fatwas in the past few years aimed at protecting the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependants by recognizing alternative methods of property disposition to *faraidh* (Muslim inheritance law). The authorities would continue to examine ways to update the Muslim inheritance laws, in consultation with the relevant civil society organizations.

65. While the Administration of Muslim Law Act still allowed for men to seek divorce through *talaq*, several other options were available to women, as detailed in paragraph 16.14 of the periodic report. The authorities were committed to continuing in their efforts to understand the practical realities of Muslim women who were seeking divorce and to upholding their right to do so. Forced marriage was prohibited in Singapore.

66. **Mr. Faishal bin Ibrahim** welcomed the Committee's invaluable insights, questions and comments, which the Government would take into account in its efforts to further women's enjoyment of their rights under the Convention in Singapore. The Government was fully aware that its principles of governance and the way that it cared for its citizens, upheld human rights and preserved social harmony might not fully conform to how other societies organized themselves. Nonetheless, every country should be given the time and space to deal with its own development and to advance human rights, including women's rights, in its own way, taking into account its unique and evolving social and cultural context. Currently ranked fifth on the human development index and eleventh on the gender inequality index, Singapore was proud of its collective efforts to advance women's rights, while acknowledging that there was room for improvement. It was committed to continuing

to work with all stakeholders, including civil society, and to reviewing policies and programmes that affected women.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.