



CEDAW SHADOW REPORT

National NGO Commentary on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations Committee on CEDAW (49th Session)

June 2011

EQUAL SPACE * EQUAL VOICE * EQUAL WORTH

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1. Foreword

By becoming a signatory to CEDAW in 1995, Singapore women have a road-map to a gold standard to equal rights, free from discrimination, in public and private life. The responsibility of working to achieve this lies with the signing state, with NGO participation in the surfacing of issues and the proposal of actions.

Since the submission of the Fourth Periodic Report in March 2009, we can look with pride on many achievements by Singapore women. We have scaled the highest peaks of Everest, conquered the South Pole, won Olympic Silver, assumed the helm of major corporations and broken new ground in many areas of research, both scientific and academic. We are also pleased to note the Government's various initiatives outlined in the Executive Summary of this Report which has brought about equality in citizenship rights, Penal Code amendments to better protect women and girls from marital rape and sex tourism and raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 for Muslim girls.

We are particularly pleased with Amendments to the Women's Charter, in effect from 1st June 2011, which incorporate many of the recommendations made by the SCWO Taskforce on Improving the Enforcement of Maintenance Orders by streamlining processes and stronger deterrents to default accompanied by family counselling, to better enable separated family units in re-building their lives.

While we acknowledge these achievements, we also have a responsibility to focus on national gender equality measures and identifying and assisting our marginalised women, with special emphasis on the elderly and infirm.

SCWO would like to encourage the appointment of more women to ministerial posts, and for the inclusion of more gender diversity in high level positions in government. The greater number of women candidates, both from the ruling party and opposition groups in our recent General Elections, and the higher number of women parliamentarians in the new cabinet appointed in May 2011, are a signal that women are ready and willing to take on political responsibilities. SCWO also would encourage gender diversity for public and private boards, and has embarked on an initiative, BoardAgender, targeted at the promotion of the importance of diversity, so that the economic and social benefits of gender diversity can be realised.

To this end, we acknowledge the work performed by the Women's Desk of the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports, and recommend its elevation of status to reflect better the importance of their work for gender mainstreaming, and the allocation of the required resources for this.

CEDAW does not automatically confer rights on women. Its promise can only be delivered if we learn to use it effectively in practice to set goals, identify and evaluate needs, advocate for change, frame laws, policies and programmes, and be willing to examine, be examined and be held accountable at national and international levels. This is the purpose behind SCWO's National NGO CEDAW Shadow Report, **Equal Space, Equal Voice, Equal Worth**.

LAURA HWANG

President, Singapore Council of Women's Organisations

8th June 2011

2. Acknowledgements

The SCWO Board and member organisations would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support and contributions to this Report:

All the participants of the SCWO programme of dialogues and consultations, whose views and everyday experiences framed the content of this Report.

Our partner organisations, for their support and attendance at our dialogues and follow-up reporting (Full list at Annex 1).

The Project Coordinators (in alphabetical order): Ms Malathi Das – Team Leader, for her exhaustive research and drafting and the commitment of precious time to the project, Mrs Laura Hwang, Ms Saleemah Ismail and Mrs Wee Wan Joo.

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Members of the SCWO CEDAW Shadow Report Project Team are associated with the following member organisations and we thank them for their support:

International Women's Forum – Mrs Laura Hwang

UN Women - Ms Saleemah Ismail

Zonta Club of Singapore - Mrs Wee Wan Joo and Ms Malathi Das.

3. Organisational Structure and Methodology

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) is the national co-ordinating body of women's organisations in Singapore. Incorporated in March 1980, the SCWO serves to unite the various women's organisations, clubs, committees, groups and women leaders together, working in accordance with its various aims and objectives. The SCWO also serves to coordinate these associations into a national movement and to act on their behalf in matters for which it is authorised by its members. The SCWO is represented on various Government and inter-ministry committees where we contribute our views in the areas of family, women, and on children's issues. We are involved in government Feedback Sessions and other discussions on issues and policies. However, we are independent of government.

SCWO is a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO) and participates actively in other regional and international networks such as:-

- (i) the APEC Women Leader's Network (WLN)
- (ii) the APEC Advisory Group on Gender Integration (AGGI)

The SCWO CEDAW Shadow Report was conducted under the supervision of SCWO, which met periodically and consisted of representatives from national women's organisations and other bodies. Members of the Committee contributed to the Project on a voluntary basis in addition to already significant workloads being carried in their individual capacities and on behalf of their organisations.

The Project had three key aims:

1. hold dialogue sessions and consultations with various representative bodies around Singapore, to provide an opportunity for a diverse range of women to learn about CEDAW and the CEDAW reporting process, and to contribute to national and international policy formation;
2. collate research done by various members in the community sector in specialised issues;
3. produce a Shadow Report that reflects the concerns of the community sector in relation to women's rights, and gives voice to the views of Singapore women and Singapore women's organisations at the United Nations.

Throughout February and until early March 2011, dialogues and consultations were held with women's organisations of various interest groups. Reports were also collated from member organisations.

This Report brings to the United Nations the collective voices of over 500,000 women who form the membership of our 51 member organisations through participation by these organisations in studies conducted by member organisations, 2 open consultations, one closed door discussion with MCYS and the IMC and several individual consultations through the gathering on materials and reports in Singapore. It also provides the voices of thousands of other women who are members of the various NGO contributors to this Report. The Report has also benefited from specialist insight provided by a number of women's and human rights organisations, including welfare, community and social service agencies during the drafting process.

The SCWO CEDAW Report has been prepared with the following parameters in mind:

- to reflect the diversity of women we represent and consulted and to voice out fairly the views expressed by women across the country during our consultation process;
- to acknowledge positive developments, ongoing challenges and recommendations for change;
- to address recommendations on all substantive Articles regardless of whether they have been covered in the 2007 Concluding Comments;
- to address concerns to all levels of government;
- to recognise that reporting (ideally) occurs within a four-year cycle, and to put forward information and recommendations that reflect anticipated issues for the 49th Reporting.

This CEDAW Shadow Report draws from all the reports and submissions received from individuals and community organisations, and the consultation process more generally.

Throughout the CEDAW NGO Report Project we have maintained an open and transparent relationship with the Government, in particular, the MCYS. As part of the project, we facilitated access to the Singapore Government's Fourth Periodic Report on the implementation of CEDAW as background material to dialogue participants.

The final step of the reporting process for the NGO sector has been to study the CEDAW Committee Concluding Comments of 10 August 2007, and critically examine if Government has in its Report responded to the same. We have also studied the CEDAW Committee's List of Issues and questions of 4 November 2010 and conducted independent research of our own into the issues raised. Finally, we have the benefit of reference to the Government's 2011 Responses and have where possible commented on the positive developments shown by the same and any continued challenges and avenues for further improvements in the next four year period.

4. Guide to Acronyms used

2007 Concluding Comments	Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Singapore (issued 10 August 2007) CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/3
2010 List of Questions	List of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of periodic reports: Singapore (issued 4 November 2010) CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/4
2011 Responses	Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of the fourth periodic report: Singapore (issued 12 May 2011) CEDAW/C/SGP/Q/4/Add.1
AMLA	Administration of Muslim Law Act
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGIO	Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organizations
Constitution	Constitution of the Republic of Singapore
CPF	Central Provident Fund
FDW	Foreign domestic worker
Government	Government of the Republic of Singapore
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
GRC	Group Representative Constituency
MCYS	Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MP	Member of Parliament
MUIS	Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)
NCMP	Non-Constituency Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NMP	Nominated Member of Parliament
NTUC	National Trades Union Congress
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PWD	Persons with Disability
SCWO	Singapore Council of Women's Organisations

**Singapore
Government Report** Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
Fourth periodic reports of States parties: Singapore (issued 3 April 2009)
CEDAW/C/SGP/4

UN United Nations

WDA Workforce Development Agency

5. Executive Summary / List of Recommendations

This national NGO CEDAW Shadow Report has been prepared by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisation (SCWO), Singapore's independent national non-governmental organization on women, in consultation with 51 member organizations across Singapore. A list of contributing organizations is attached at Annex 1.

The Report comments on positive developments as well as highlights inequalities still facing women in Singapore and where opinions are divided, that diversity is reflected.

We welcome the Government's various initiatives to address the inequalities since the last reporting period. These include:

- change in citizenship law and its subsequent lifting of its reservation to Article 9
- amendments to the Penal Code including partial abolition of marital rape immunity thereby affording protection to married women, and the further providing of extra-territorial application of criminal laws against sex tourism providing for greater protection to girls
- increase in the number of women in politics and public life
- reduction in the income gap between men and women
- development of enhanced initiatives to encourage joint parenting and encourage women in their roles as mothers
- raising the minimum age of marriage for Muslim girls
- amendments to the Women's Charter to introduce enhanced measures to improve enforcement of maintenance orders (with effect from 1 June 2011)

However, there are still some important issues on which Singapore women's organisations would like to see greater progress made, and we make the following recommendations with this in mind:

Reservations

1. that the Government consider the removal of its blanket reservation to Articles 2 and 16, and consider retaining only partial reservations to Article 2(f) and Article 16(1)(a) and 16(1)(c).
2. that the Government consider a withdrawal of its blanket reservations to Article 11(1), and limit its reservation with a statement to the effect that it does not accept the application of Article 11(1) in so far as it would require alteration of its defence policy which excludes women from combat duties, such combat duties being given a narrow definition.

Articles 2 and 3: Policy measures / Guarantee of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms

3. that the Government implement a state-wide overarching strategy on gender equality and incorporate targets on all critical areas for action in the Beijing Platform for Action which has been ratified by the State
4. that the status of the Women's Desk of the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports (MCYS) be elevated and resourced to develop gender equality policies, monitor their

implementation and ensure that gender is mainstreamed, as well as there be improved public availability of gender disaggregated data

5. that the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on CEDAW act as a catalyst for effective gender mainstreaming and that all government ministries routinely conduct gender impact assessments when developing policy and conduct regular analysis of legal and policy measures taken towards the practical realization of equality.
6. that the Government looks into measures to improve the protection of older women from social and economic marginalisation and abuse.

Article 4: Temporary Special Measures

7. that the Government adopt a range of supportive measures to improve gender diversity on Boards of public organisations and public companies

Article 5: Sex Role Stereotyping and Prejudice

8. that the Government proactively address cultural gender stereotypes that discourage male participation in child-rearing, and instead reinforce the shared values of family life and child care
9. that the Government commit to public education programmes both for the young and adults, including policy-makers, to inform them of gender issues
10. that the Government impose stricter regulations on practitioners and agencies purporting to offer aesthetic services and on advertising in the media, and give official recognition to companies which promote positive body image and undertake responsible advertising

Article 6: Trafficking and Prostitution

11. that the Government recognize that there are incidents of trafficking in women in Singapore and address the issue comprehensively
12. that the Government be encouraged to use a human rights framework in its response to trafficking instead of a predominantly transnational criminal justice framework
13. that the Government be encouraged to explore legal reform so that compensation is more available to victims of trafficking from agencies and other parties involved

Article 7: Political and Public Life

14. that the Government be encouraged to accelerate the promotion of female Parliamentarians to ministerial appointments
15. that the Government include more gender diversity in high level positions in government
16. that the Government commit to on-going funding for national women's consultative structures and strengthen its dialogue and interaction with these groups in a sustained manner
17. that the Government fund leadership, development and mentoring programmes specifically for women with disability and ensure the integration of these women in decision-making positions
18. that the Government commit to a policy of gender mainstreaming and allocate resources for gender equity activities

19. that the Government produce a National Gender Equality Programme to articulate Singapore's gender architecture

Article 9: Nationality

20. that the Government evaluate its position on the provision of aid (whether legal, financial or social) to foreign women whose marriages with a Singapore partner have broken down
21. that the Government evaluate its policy as regards the grant of permanent residency status to foreign women in long marriages with Singapore partners or with Singaporean children

Article 10: Education

22. that the Government update and implement a national vocational education, skills upgrading and training policy for women formulated around women-centred principles – in particular, gender equity and inclusiveness – as well as have quantifiable key performance indicators and targeted interventions for disadvantaged groups of women, and associated employment outcomes

Article 11: Employment

23. that the Government provide details on the practical implementation and impact of measures taken to promote fair employment practices
24. that the Government present additional statistical data on the gender wage gap of all male and female employees and examine the reasons behind the gender wage gap and implement practical measures to reduce this gap, with the aim of eliminating it completely
25. that the Government provide information on the measures taken to ensure that programmes to enhance work-life balance are targeted at both men and women to encourage the equal sharing of work and family responsibilities and implement industry-specific measures aimed at promoting better work-life harmony and periodically evaluate their effectiveness
26. that the Government provide details on the number of women who have benefited from the Continuing Education and Training system established by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA)
27. that gender-disaggregated data on the impact of employment policies on the working population be collected more regularly, and that this data is made available to the public. Statistical data on the key indicators of gender equality should also be collected and updated on a regular basis
28. that the Government address the gender disparity in retirement incomes

Article 12: Health

29. that the Government acknowledge that healthcare including mental healthcare needs of women at different stages of life (i.e. adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, advanced adulthood) by ensuring that subsidised comprehensive health screening programmes are made available to women of all ages
30. that the Government develop a health infrastructure for women with disability
31. that the Government introduce a uniform National Curriculum on sexual health and better training of health professionals in the provision of youth-based sexual health services

Article 13: Social and Economic Benefits

32. that the Government work closely with employers to enhance the work-life balance of working mothers and single women who are the main caregivers of aged or infirm parents or siblings
33. that the Government conduct a comprehensive study on the sufficiency of current initiatives and programmes for female caregivers with disability or women with disability caring for children with disability
34. that the Government review what, if any, de facto and de jure discriminatory practices exist in public housing programmes and commit to increased funding, access and availability to various forms of supported housing, particularly that which meets the needs of disadvantaged women

Violence Against Women

35. that, in addition to addressing the underlying causes of domestic violence, the Government increase funding and support to shelters and support services for victims of domestic violence, whilst enforcing laws which assist women escaping domestic or family violence situations to stay in their homes with the perpetrator leaving instead
36. that the Government adopt systemic responses to address needs of children who have witnessed or experienced family violence

6. Reservations: Articles 2, 11(1) and 16

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee has in its Concluding Comments noted its deep concern about the State's continued general reservations to Articles 2 and 16 and its reservation to Article 11, paragraph 1.*
2. *The Committee urged the State to exert its efforts towards the withdrawal, within a concrete time frame, of these reservations.*
3. *The CEDAW pre-session working group has further requested information on the State's progress towards withdrawing the reservations as well as an analysis of the precise scope of these reservations and their impact on different groups of women.*

Positive Developments

6.1. Consideration of withdrawal of reservations

1. Although no formal response was given in the State Report as regards its progress towards withdrawing its reservations, it is understood that the matter is being considered by the IMC and is work in progress.
2. We believe the concern is to ensure that any blanket withdrawal is in accordance with Singapore's Constitution which, in addition to enshrining the principle of equality before the law, also enshrines the principle of freedom of religion and freedom to practice one's religion, and the special position of Malays.
3. SCWO, in its dialogue with the Government, has proposed removing blanket reservations to Articles 2 and 16 and limiting any such reservations only to such extent as may be necessary given the current state of Islamic jurisprudence and its application in Singapore.
4. We are therefore pleased to note the indication in the 2011 Responses that this suggestion has found favour.

6.2. Progress in practice

5. With respect to Articles 2 and 16, it has been observed that during the reporting period, various substantive changes have been brought about towards rationalising the dual systems of civil law and Shariah law governing the personal law of Muslim Singaporeans whilst remaining sensitive to the basic tenets of the Islamic faith.
6. This has been done in consultation with the Muslim community and various stakeholders, and through legislative changes, pronouncements in the civil courts as well as the Fatwa Committee of MUIS.
7. We make the following observations in this regard:
 - (a) Civil provisions on applications for maintenance during marriage are available to a Muslim woman and her children.

- (b) Principles governing the division of matrimonial property in divorces are identical in Muslim and non-Muslim cases.
 - (c) Principles governing the custody, care and control and access of children are identical in Muslim and non-Muslim cases. The local law enacted upon Singapore's ratification of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, i.e., the International Child Abduction Act, also makes no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim parties or children.
 - (d) Amendments to the Administration of Muslim Law Act mean Muslim women may avail themselves of the same range of enforcement proceedings for maintenance as in civil marriages, including recent amendments to the Women's Charter to strengthen enforcement proceedings.
 - (e) Civil provisions on obtaining Personal Protection Orders are available to both Muslims and non-Muslim victims of family violence.
 - (f) In March 2010, a decision of Singapore's highest Court, the Court of Appeal, **Shafeeg bin Salim Talib and anor v Fatimah bte Abud bin Talib and Ors** [2010] 2 SLR 1123 clarified that the concept of joint tenancy and the right of survivorship in civil law was equally applicable to parties who are Muslim and upheld the devolution of a property (held in joint-tenancy by her and her late husband) to a Muslim woman absolutely by way of the right of survivorship.
 - (g) A MUIS statement on 31 March 2010 following the decision confirming that it would respect the fact that the decision of the civil courts will take precedence over its fatwas.
 - (h) Another new recent development is a pronouncement through a recent fatwa that CPF monies will go to nominees unless no nomination is made¹. This is consistent with the position under intestacy laws governing non-Muslims.
8. In the light of the above, we would say that, in reality, save for limited instances of divorce, marriage and inheritance, it is timely that Singapore carves out of its blanket reservations those parts of the Article which it has already in effect been in compliance with.
9. We also note that Malaysia, which had originally expressed reservations on Article 2(f) on grounds of its dual system of civil and Muslim law has long since (in 1998) withdrawn its reservation to Article 2(f), as well its reservations to Article 16(b), 16(d), 16(e) and 16(h).
10. Given Singapore's common heritage with Malaysia and similarities in experiences and cultural make-up, we are confident that the Singapore Government would be able to accelerate its progression towards complete removal of reservations as has Malaysia.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government consider a withdrawal of its blanket reservations to Articles 2 and 16 and limit its reservation to Article 2 to sub paragraph 2(f) and Article 16 to paragraphs (1)(a) and (1)(c).

¹ Media Statement, 23 September 2010 – Updated Fatwa on the Religious Status of Nomination for CPF Monies: http://www.muis.gov.sg/cms/uploadedFiles/MuisGovSG/News_Events/Press_Releases/Updated%20Fatwa%20on%20the%20Religious%20Status%20of%20Nomination%20for%20CPF%20Monies.pdf

Challenges to the removal of reservations to Article 11(1)

11. With respect to Article 11(1), the Government in its 2011 Responses has still maintained its total reservation to this paragraph, its rationale being the need to safeguard women and their unborn children from certain hazardous occupations in the military to avoid deploying women in combat roles in time of hostility.
12. We would point out that Article 11(1)(f) in fact recognises the function of reproduction, and does so in a gender-neutral way.
13. Since the Government's concern is that compliance with this Article may compromise its application of defence policies, we would again propose that it confine any reservation to the specific concern that needs addressing.
14. For example, we note that the government of Australia had, on ratification, previously expressed its reservation in the following way²:

"The Government of Australia advises that it does not accept the application of the Convention in so far as it would require alteration of Defence Force policy which excludes women from combat duties. The Government of Australia is reviewing this policy so as to more closely define 'combat' and 'combat-related duties.'"

15. We understand this reservation to have been removed in 30 August 2000³.
16. Likewise in the case of New Zealand⁴, upon ratification, it had previously expressed its reservation as follows with respect to armed combat:

"The Government of New Zealand, the Government of the Cook Islands and the Government of Niue reserve the right not to apply the provisions of the Convention in so far as they are inconsistent with policies relating to recruitment into or service in

(a) the Armed Forces which reflect either directly or indirectly the fact that members of such forces are required to serve on armed forces aircraft or vessels and in situations involving armed combat..."

17. On 5 July 2007, New Zealand notified of its withdrawal of its reservations in so far as it applied to the metropolitan area of New Zealand⁵.
18. We recommend that the Government consider taking a calibrated and more nuanced approach in its treatment of its reservation on this ground.
19. We also recommend that following any such consideration of a partial reservation, Singapore also study the experiences of jurisdictions such as Australia and New Zealand in their progress towards complete withdrawal of this reservation.

² Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>

³ United Nations Treaty Collection:

http://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en#3

⁴ Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>

⁵ United Nations Treaty Collection:

http://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en#44

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government consider a withdrawal of its blanket reservation to Article 11(1), and limit its reservation with a statement to the effect that it does not accept the application of Article 11(1) in so far as it would require alteration of its defence policy which excludes women from combat duties, such combat duties being given a narrow definition.

7. Articles 1 – 3: Definition of discrimination, Policy measures and Guarantee of basic human rights & fundamental freedoms

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

Article 1

- 1. The CEDAW Committee in its 2007 Concluding Comments encouraged Singapore to incorporate in its Constitution or other appropriate legislation a definition of discrimination against women, encompassing both direct and indirect discrimination.*
- 2. The lack of specific reference in the Constitution guaranteeing freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender has been addressed in questions of the Committee in the 2007 Concluding Comments 2007 and the 2010 List of Questions. No comment specifically addressing this issue has been made in the 2011 Responses.*
- 3. The CEDAW Committee in its 2007 Concluding Comments encouraged Singapore to incorporate a definition of discrimination against women and include provisions to also prohibit discrimination against women on grounds of marital status, age, disability and national origin.*

Article 2

- 4. The CEDAW Committee in its 2007 Concluding Comments called upon Singapore to provide systemic and sustained training for lawyers, judges, law enforcement officers, educators, leaders of People's Association, NGOs and trade unions on CEDAW and its concept of de facto or substantive gender equality.*

Article 3

- 5. The CEDAW Committee in its 2007 Concluding Comments raised concerns about the existence of the dual legal system of civil law and Shariah law in regard to personal status resulting in discrimination against Muslim women in the field of marriage, divorce and inheritance. It urged Singapore to undertake a system of law reform to remove inconsistencies between civil law and Shariah law and encouraged Singapore to undertake studies in comparative jurisprudence and legislation of other countries with similar legal systems as regards the interpretation of Muslim law and its codifications.*
- 6. The CEDAW Committee in its 2007 Concluding Comments expressed concern that the location of the national machinery for the advancement of women, the Women's Desk, within the Family Development Unit of MCYS limits its authority, human and financial resources and capacity to ensure gender equality policies are properly developed and fully implemented across ministries.*

Positive Developments

7.1. Constitutional protection

20. Equality is entrenched in the Constitution under Article 12 (1), the supreme law which declares that any law enacted that is inconsistent with it is to the extent void. This guarantees to all persons (not just Singaporeans) equality before the law and equal protection of the law.
21. Article 12(2) identifies four forbidden classifications – religion, race, descent and place of birth – upon which Singaporeans may not be discriminated for specific reasons, such as in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.
22. The word ‘gender’ is conspicuous by its absence though there is an assumption that the word ‘persons’ in Article 12(1) should be read inclusively to encompass men and women and this provides adequate protection to enshrine non-discrimination of women. This has been the government’s position. This view has also been supported by academics⁶.
23. Persons unable to show that one of the forbidden classifications under Article 12(2) applies to them may try to argue that they are members of a group defined by a law in a way that violates the general guarantee of equality and equal protection under Article 12(1).
24. Very few cases based on a challenge to the Constitution are litigated in Singapore. None alleging the unconstitutionality of gender-biased laws or policies have ever been pursued.
25. However, based on a recent case law development on constitutional challenges to discriminatory laws, it would appear that there continues to be judicial recognition of the right of an individual to mount a constitutional challenge in the Singapore Courts where laws are passed which discriminate against him or her personally, although not in that particular case, on an issue based on gender.
26. This provides a concrete avenue of remedies. It was held in the case of **Tan Eng Hong v Attorney-General** [2011] SGHC 56 that such a challenge may be mounted by the mere presence of an unconstitutional law in the statute books.

7.2. Progress in practice

27. It is also notable that there are various local legislations where gender equality is expressed in a positive form.
28. We note that the CEDAW Committee has called for specific anti-discrimination legislation, but believe that given the constitutional protection in Article 12(1), the supreme law has enshrined equality, including that of gender, within the Singapore Constitutional context.
29. We do however also note that Malaysia has since amended its Constitution to include ‘gender’ specifically under the provision in the Federal Constitution which is *in pari materia* to Article 12(2) as a forbidden classification against discrimination, but such amendment would effectively confine gender equality to the specific instances enumerated in Article 12(2).

⁶ Thio, The Impact of Internationalisation on Domestic Governance: Gender Egalitarianism & the Transformative Potential of CEDAW [1997] SJICL 9

30. Our preference is for a much broader interpretation of Article 12(1) in all aspects over and above the areas of '*appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.*'
31. An expansive reading of Article 12(1) is therefore preferable to piecemeal additions to Article 12(2).
32. Thus, we would advocate that formal gender equality is constitutionally guaranteed and other pieces of legislation already envisage a progressive role for women in the family⁷. These should encourage women to speak out against discriminatory practices or laws fearlessly.

Challenges to the implementation of Articles 1 – 3

7.3. Multi-level discrimination

33. There is concern within the NGO sector of the need to recognise that discrimination does not only happen in discrete categories of gender, but that the intersections of age and gender, or disability and gender, or nationality and gender, present particular challenges in securing women's rights.

7.4. Vulnerable socio-economic status of older or aged women

34. Older women often face discrimination based on their age as well as their gender. Discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes in the workplace and in other social spaces create particular barriers for older women in achieving equal enjoyment of their rights.
35. Community organisations at our consultations reported that older women are a particularly vulnerable social group, due to a range of factors associated with aging, including:
 - the increasing health needs and costs
 - the long-term impact of historical disadvantage in educational opportunities
 - lower participation rates in workforce linked to stereotyping leading to long-term economic disadvantage
 - social and cultural discrimination and isolation, particularly where women have been widowed or divorced
 - eroded security of tenure, increased reliance on residential care facilities, family and friends, and increased risk of homelessness – there are anecdotal reports of the elderly being persuaded to transfer their public housing property to their children who refinance the purchase with their Central Provident Funds so that the elder is able to ostensibly realise the property's value in cash, when in effect, the children end up keeping the cash instead and subsequently turn the parent out on the streets
 - weak economic resources hindering women in competing for private rental
 - in circumstances of homelessness, women's shelters are often not appropriate for aged women
 - ongoing caring responsibilities, from not just caring for their children, but also grandchildren, particularly when there is marital breakdown in their children's lives

⁷ For example s46 of the Women's Charter

36. In **Hsu Ann Mei Amy (personal representative of the estate of Hwang Cheng Tsu Hsu, deceased) v Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation** [2011] SGCA 3, a Court of Appeal decision, the Court recognized the dangers of financial elder abuse occurring and made several recommendations in relation to fraud and financial abuse aimed at improved protection of older Singaporeans.
37. These recommendations would also enhance the protection and well-being of older women.
38. It is hoped that with such judicial pronouncements, such guidelines will see across the board implementation by the various stakeholders concerned.

7.5. Unavailability of gender disaggregated data

39. The availability of gender disaggregated data remains a challenge, particularly in relation to access, analysis and reporting of the data. Some data is collected and is publicly accessible on relevant websites. However, the expenses of undertaking disaggregation often inhibit analysis of the data and the availability of relevant data. Further, gender disaggregated data is rarely made available in a 'user-friendly' format and in a way that makes relevant series of data easy to identify.
40. NGOs are at a significant disadvantage in not having under their control the necessary financial resources, infrastructure and statistical expertise to conduct the detailed monitoring and statistical analysis necessary to conduct human rights advocacy and very much depend on available government provided data for this purpose.
41. We note, however, that the inclusion of gender disaggregated data has generally improved in the current Singapore Government Report, and has moved from providing snap shot data at a point in time (being the latest data available) to trying to provide sets of historic time series data to assist in the effective monitoring of the developments in certain human rights issues.
42. We note that the Women's Desk has worked collaboratively with the Singapore Department of Statistics and NGOs in response to the 2007 Concluding Comments. However, we look forward to additional resources channeled into making gender disaggregated data available in order to provide women's NGOs with adequate statistics to monitor and report on Singapore's international human rights obligations, including those under CEDAW.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the Government implement a state-wide overarching strategy on gender equality and incorporate targets on all critical areas of action in the Beijing Platform for Action which has been ratified by the State.
- ⇒ THAT the status of the Women's Desk of the MCYS be elevated and resourced to develop gender equality policies, monitor their implementation and ensure that gender is mainstreamed, as well as there be improved public availability of gender disaggregated data (in terms of access, analysis and reporting).
- ⇒ THAT the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) on CEDAW act as catalyst for effective gender mainstreaming and that all government ministries routinely conduct gender impact assessments when developing policy and conduct regular analysis of legal and policy measures taken towards the practical realization of equality.
- ⇒ THAT the Government look into measures to improve the protection of older women from social and economic marginalisation and abuse.

8. Article 4: Temporary Special Measures

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee encouraged Singapore to intensify its efforts towards strengthening women's representation in leadership roles, including elected and appointed positions in the Cabinet, Parliament, public administration, the judiciary and the private sector.*
2. *It recommended that Singapore strengthen its nomination, selection and promotion procedures with temporary special measures.*

Positive Developments

8.1. Increased representation in practice

43. Notwithstanding the fact that there are currently no temporary special measures in place to ensure equitable gender representation in Parliament, certain processes adopted by the Government have had the effect of more women being represented in Parliament.
44. One such mechanism is the Group Representation Constituency (GRC). Under this scheme, when a team of candidates is fielded for a particular GRC, it must comprise at least one representative from a minority racial group.
45. The other mechanism which has been introduced to the Singapore Parliamentary process has been that of a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) introduced in 1990. An NMP is an MP appointed instead of being elected into office, and who does not belong to any political party or represent any constituency, and is done with a view to bringing more independent voices into Parliament.
46. NMPs are appointed by the President of Singapore for a term of two and a half years on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee chaired by the Speaker of Parliament. These may be persons who have rendered distinguished public service or who have brought honour to Singapore and also from community groups in the fields of arts and letters, culture, the sciences, business, industry, the professions, social or community service, and the labour movement, from the people sector such as candidates from the environmental movement, young activists, new citizens and community and grassroots leaders.
47. Just before Parliament was prorogued before the May 2011 elections, there were 9 NMPs, of which 4 were women.
48. In the recent elections, all 15 GRCs saw at least 1 woman fielded as part of the team. The net result saw 13 women MPs from the ruling party being elected and 1 opposition woman MP returned to Parliament as MPs in GRCs. Of the remaining 12 Single Member Constituencies (SMC), only 2 women were fielded by the ruling party, both of whom won. One opposition woman MP who had the highest percentage of losing votes will also become a Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP). The highest percentage of votes won whether in a GRC or SMC, was by Dr Amy Khor in her SMC ward of Hong Kah North.
49. However, Singapore's only woman full Minister, Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, lost her seat in the same elections.

50. At the latest Cabinet announcement, no woman Minister has been included in the new Cabinet line-up, although 6 positions for Senior Minister / Minister of State (Finance, Transport, Information and the Arts, Environment and Water Resource, Health, Community Development Youth and Sports) are now held by women, and 2 positions for Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Law and Education) are held by women.
51. In the past, the reason given as to why the ruling party did not field female candidates or sufficient female candidates is that they were unwilling to come forward or give up their privacy. Time pressures were also cited as reasons.
52. What is noted, however, is that at least in the recent elections, there have been more women stepping forward, including young women (the youngest female candidate was a 24 year old opposition candidate) whether to contest in GRCs or SMCs.
53. This signals an increased interest from women, both from the ruling party and opposition, in policies which shape their lives and is an expression of wanting their voices to be heard.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 4

8.2. Underrepresentation of women on boards/senior management

54. In March 2011, research done by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School's Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organisations (CGIO) and BoardAgender found that women made up 6.8% of all boardroom positions in listed companies in Singapore in 2010.
55. Data from CGIO shows that 61.7% of firms in Singapore did not have any female representation on their boards. 31.1% had one woman on their boards and 6.0% had three or more women. Only ten companies (1.2%) had three or more women represented on their boards. Furthermore, females hold only 4.2% of the directorships in finance companies, a traditionally male-dominated industry. It was found that in Singapore, women are less likely to be Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chairperson or Chair of committees on boards⁸.
56. This trend is not unique to Singapore. Based on the findings from 20-first's Womenomics 101 Survey, only slightly more than half of the companies surveyed in the US and 32% of those in Europe have at least one woman on their Executive Committees. Companies in Asia fared the worst, with 82% having no women on Executive Committees⁹.
57. The aforementioned findings are troubling, particularly because the benefits of gender diversity in the boardroom are real and have been well established through research. For instance, a study by Catalyst, the leading non-profit membership organization focused on increasing opportunities for women in business, found a positive correlation between the number of female board directors and corporate performance¹⁰. A study of 101 companies by McKinsey and Co. took it one step further by revealing that performance increases significantly once a certain critical mass – 30% – is attained. Below this threshold no significant difference in company performance was observed¹¹. While we acknowledge that correlations do not imply causation, the benefits of having diversity on corporate boards cannot be denied.

⁸ Press Release by NUS Business School & BoardAgender:

http://bschool.nus.edu.sg/Portals/0/images/CGFRC/Press%20Release_Singapore%20Board%20Diversity%20Index_2011March7.pdf

⁹ 20-first's Womenomics 101 Survey: <http://www.20-first.com/files/20-firstwomenomics101.pdf>

¹⁰ The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards:

<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/200/the-bottom-line-corporate-performance-and-womens-representation-on-boards>

¹¹ Women Matter. Gender diversity - a corporate performance driver:

http://www.mckinsey.com/locations/swiss/news_publications/pdf/women_matter_english.pdf

58. We suspect that the situation in Singapore is less than ideal because knowledge about the advantages of gender-balanced business is still not widespread amongst local firms.
59. It is noteworthy, then, that steps are being taken to help resolve this issue. Launched in March 2011, BoardAgender (an initiative of SCWO) is dedicated to increasing the awareness and understanding of the economic and social benefits of gender diversity in the workplace at senior levels. Also, together with CGIO at the NUS Business School, BoardAgender launched the Singapore Board Diversity Index, which provides comprehensive publicly available data measuring female participation on Singapore boards on an annual basis.
60. It is hoped that through greater awareness, companies in both the public and private sectors will fill up seats on their boards by means of searches based on skill sets and knowledge. If the recruitment process is transparent and meritocratic, and given that women are well represented in the workforce in Singapore, there is no doubt that female representation among corporate boards would rise.
61. We do not endorse the imposition of a quota system on companies; rather, we would recommend an alteration to the current corporate governance guidelines, requiring companies to disclose how they consider gender diversity when nominating people for their boards.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT Government adopt a range of supportive measures to improve gender diversity on Boards of public organizations and public companies.

9. Article 5: Sex role stereotyping and prejudice

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee reiterated its concern about the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family and society at large.*
2. *The CEDAW Committee recommended that Singapore take measures to bring about changes to patriarchal attitudes and gender-role stereotyping through awareness-raising and public education campaigns.*
3. *It also recommended Singapore expand its current awareness-raising efforts and training activities to leaders of political parties and senior managers in the private sector.*

Challenges to the implementation of Article 5

62. Gender stereotyping is an obstacle to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the realisation of substantive equality. Although wrongful gender stereotyping affects both sexes, it has had, and continues to have, a particularly harmful effect on women. Of particular concern are:

- *stereotypes of women as primary caregivers*, which implies that women (and, conversely, not men) should prioritise child-rearing and other forms of caregiving (e.g. caring for ill or older relatives) over all other roles they might perform or choose;

- *stereotypes of men as primary breadwinners*, which implies that men (and, conversely, not women) should bear the principal responsibility for providing for, and ensuring, the financial security of their families, and that this role should take priority over other roles they might perform or choose, including especially care-giving;
- *stereotypes of women as sex objects*, which implies that women should conform to prevailing concepts of beauty and sexuality and are therefore only valued for their beauty and sexual attractiveness.

Paid parental leave

63. An example of the perpetuation of the sex-role stereotypes of women as primary caregivers and men as primary breadwinners is the recent debate in Singapore regarding maternity leave. Largely invisible from this important (and long overdue) debate was the role of men in care-giving, although one of our member organizations, AWARE called for paid paternity leave.
64. In contrast, women's role as carers was not only front and centre of the debate, but the debate was also conducted in a way that often assumed that women *should* fulfill the role of carers. For example, public debate mostly centered on paid 'maternity' leave, in contrast to the concept of 'parental' leave which emphasises the common responsibility of women and men in the upbringing of children.
65. Dialogue sessions with our other member organizations saw a strong call for a paid parental leave scheme, which allows a couple the flexibility of sharing the parenting role in a manner that works best for them.
66. Although the Government has not discounted future consideration of parental leave, the deferral of consideration of paid paternity leave provisions will interact with entrenched community attitudes in a manner which perpetuates women's role as primary care givers.
67. Whilst the Government must be commended in its support for flexible work hours for women in promoting work-life balance, more steps can be taken to encourage or require workplaces to adopt policies and foster a culture that supports men who choose to perform the role of primary caregiver. Such measures would allow both sexes to share equitable care-giving, and would lessen the impact that having children has on women's full development and advancement.
68. We would note that this would be consistent with existing Singapore legislation in the form of section 46 of the Women's Charter which states '*Upon the solemnization of marriage, the husband and the wife shall be mutually bound to co-operate with each other in safeguarding the interests of the union and in caring and providing for the children.*'
69. Thus a case can be made for comprehensive legislative protection from discrimination for both men and women as a result of family and caring responsibilities where it is not about women caring less, it is about enabling men to care more.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the Government proactively address cultural gender stereotypes that discourage male participation in child-rearing, and reinforce the shared values of family life and child care.
- ⇒ THAT the Government commit to public education programmes both for the young and adults, including policy-makers, to inform them of gender issues.

9.1. Body image and media portrayal of gender

70. Along with worldwide trends, negative body image is having a significant and detrimental impact on the self-image of young Singaporeans, with young women being particularly susceptible to negative social and cultural stereotypes. Underlying the body image anxieties of young women is the stereotype of women as sex objects, particularly bodies with characteristics of being unnaturally thin, young and fair-skinned. The sex object stereotype implies that women derive their worth from beauty and physical or sexual attractiveness.
71. There is arguably an epidemic of body dissatisfaction growing amongst young Singaporean girls. In a 2007 survey¹², 84% of teenage girls in Singapore (between the ages of 15-17 years) wished they could change their appearance, with 60% feeling bad about themselves because of looks or weight. 5% of the teenage girls surveyed confessed to throwing up or refusing to eat in order to control their body weight and 25% of the women polled (between the ages of 15 to 64 years old) reported dieting before reaching the age of 17 years. 1 in 5 Singaporean women also considered having plastic surgery in the future to alter their physical appearance.
72. Media and advertising industry portrayal of women and gender is commonly thought of as leading contributing factors for the prevalence of negative body image in women. According to the same study, the top 3 influencers for teenage girls in Singapore are: female friends (35%), media (23%) and mothers (18%).
73. We would encourage a nation-wide campaign working with schools and relevant stakeholders in the areas of body image, youth engagement, media, fashion and advertising. New media can be used to positively affect and engage young girls.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government impose stricter regulations on practitioners and agencies purporting to offer aesthetic services, and on advertising in the media, and give official recognition to companies which promote positive body image and undertake responsible advertising.

10. Article 6: Trafficking and prostitution

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

- 1. The CEDAW Committee expressed its concern at the narrow definition of trafficking employed by Singapore. It was also concerned that women and girls who have been trafficked may be punished for violation of immigration laws and treated as offenders instead of victims.*
- 2. The CEDAW Committee in its 2010 List of Questions also wanted to know what steps Singapore has taken to ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime.*

¹² Study - "Beauty, Self Esteem and the Asian Teenager", conducted by global research company Millward Brown: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/26080/Research-on-Singapore-Teenage-Girls>

3. *The CEDAW Committee also requested for information on sentences imposed on cases of trafficking against women and girls, on perpetrators and on reparation granted to victims, as well as steps taken to collect sex-disaggregated data on trafficking.*
4. *The CEDAW Committee has sought information on public awareness campaigns for the general public regarding issues of trafficking and on amendments to the Penal Code.*
5. *The CEDAW Committee also requested that Singapore comment on reports that it has never investigated prosecuted or convicted a national or permanent resident.*

Positive Developments

10.1. Legislative efforts to support the criminalisation of trafficking and protection of trafficked women

74. Various statutes comprehensively criminalise the practice of trafficking in persons: Penal Code, Women's Charter, Children and Young Persons Act, Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, Employment Agencies Act, Employment Agency Rules, and the Conditions of Work Permits.
75. The Penal Code's regime against trafficking also has extra-territorial reach over Singapore Citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents committing the offences abroad who may face prosecution here.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government be commended for making legislative changes to boost its ability to meet the challenges of trafficking.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 6

10.2. Singapore identified as destination country for trafficking

76. Notwithstanding the above, Singapore was ranked Tier 2 in the US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons 2010 Report¹³ and identified as a destination country for women and girls subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced prostitution, and for some migrant workers in conditions that may be indicative of forced labor.
77. The enforcement of the above laws was also criticised as being inadequate in that it was reported that the Singapore government could and should be more successful in finding, prosecuting, and punishing those responsible for human trafficking and that despite proactive measures taken by the Singapore government to identify and protect victims of trafficking, those measures proved insufficient to generate additional prosecutions for sex or labor trafficking.
78. The Government has published a point-by-point rebuttal of this report¹⁴ and it is not our intention to enter into an evaluation of the factual merits of either report save for the purpose of

¹³ US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report 2010 – Singapore:
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/type,ANNUALREPORT,,SGP,4c1883c8c,0.html>

¹⁴ Singapore's Detailed Response to the Allegations in the 2010 US State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report:
[http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mica/press_release/P-20100703-1/AttachmentPar/0/file/Detailed%20Reponse%20TIP%20report%202010%20\(Final\).pdf](http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mica/press_release/P-20100703-1/AttachmentPar/0/file/Detailed%20Reponse%20TIP%20report%202010%20(Final).pdf)

highlighting that continued measures can be taken to improve the enforcement mechanisms and their response to this problem.

10.3. Acknowledgement of existence of trafficking

79. Foreign workers make up at least up to one-third of Singapore's total labour force, which is considered to be the highest proportion in Asia. Comprising workers from Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and elsewhere in Asia, most of them are unskilled and semi-skilled laborers employed in construction, domestic households, and the service industries.
80. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many may face deception about the nature of their employment or salary, confiscation of their passport, restriction on their movement, illegal withholding of their pay, or physical or sexual abuse at the hands of employers whether domestic or commercial. Many domestic workers in Singapore face debts associated with their employment that may amount to six to ten months' wages, which can make them vulnerable to forced labor.
81. The vast majority of people trafficked to Singapore identified to date have been women, including those for illegal prostitution or illegal labour.
82. It is therefore important that there be an acknowledgement of this issue by government to provide a greater impetus to combat human trafficking under the guise of legal entry and legal employment.
83. Such acknowledgement coupled with public education and awareness on a national scale and a multi-disciplinary intervention policy would serve us well.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government acknowledge the existence of trafficking in women in Singapore and address the issue comprehensively.

10.4. Improving the response to trafficked women and girls

84. We acknowledge that steps have been taken to assist victims during the prosecution process, but have further suggestions for improvement as follows:
 - any temporary visa granted for the duration of prosecution should be expanded to cover civil proceedings for trafficked persons, in order to provide access to compensation.
 - there be provision of counselling and access to specialist support for victims and this should not be linked to whether a trafficked person is cooperating with or able to assist a criminal justice investigation, but should be based on need;
 - referral protocols, or a national referral mechanism, be developed to better facilitate inter-agency cooperation and comprehensive protection of trafficked persons.

10.5. Awareness and education

85. Currently awareness and public education programmes have been undertaken in the main by NGOs.
86. A National Communication Awareness Strategy should be considered by the Government to demonstrate its commitment to the eradication of trafficking.
87. Such a strategy should apply to all forms of trafficking with any review and development of the strategy occurring in full consultation with relevant organisations, whose contact details should be included in all awareness-raising materials.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the Government be encouraged to use a human rights framework in drawing up a comprehensive response to trafficking, and to move away from a predominantly transnational criminal justice framework.
- ⇒ THAT the Government be encouraged to explore legal reform so that compensation is more available to victims of trafficking from agencies and other parties involved.

11. Article 7: Political and public life

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee in the 2007 Concluding Comments expressed its concern at the low level of representation of women in Parliament, there being no woman Ministers in Cabinet and women being under-represented at senior levels within the public administration, including the diplomatic service, the judiciary and educational institutions as well as the private sector.*
2. *The CEDAW Committee in its 2010 List of Questions also wanted to know what steps Singapore has taken to strengthen women's participation in public and political life and in decision-making positions including in the Cabinet, Parliament, the judiciary, public administration and the private sector. It also questioned what measures had been undertaken to improve the political participation and participation in public life of women belonging to minority groups and women with disabilities.*

Positive Developments

11.1. Increased numbers of females in senior public positions

88. Since the last reporting period, there has been an increase in women being appointed or elected to senior leadership positions. Unfortunately, between the last Report and this we had our first full woman Minister appointed and lost, due to the loss of her GRC team at the last elections. No woman has been appointed as full Minister in the line-up of the new Cabinet, although 6 positions for Senior Minister / Minister of State (Finance, Transport, Information and the Arts, Environment and Water Resource, Health, Community Development Youth and Sports) are held by women, and 2 positions for Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Law and Education) are held by women.

89. Additionally, since our last reporting period, a woman has been appointed as our Solicitor-General and as Registrar of the Shariah Court.
90. The male-female ratio in the civil Judiciary has also improved:
- a. with 16.7% in 2010 (up from 11.8% in 2000) in the High Court
 - b. and woman judges in the Subordinate Courts actually outnumbered men with 51.3% (up from 44.1%).
91. In the diplomatic field, figures have also improved with a total of 6 women ambassadors and heads of mission.

11.2. Representation in Parliament

92. We welcome the continued consistent increase of female members in the Singapore Parliament. Currently, 19 of the 87 seats (21.8%) are occupied by women, including for a first time, a female elected member of the opposition. Additionally, there will again be 1 female NCMP. Before Parliament was prorogued, 4 out of 8 NMPs were women. They had been appointed on 18 July 2009 for a two and a half year term.
93. Qualitatively, we also note that female MPs have been found to be more vocal in Parliament.
94. In a Straits Time article published in December 2010, with the provocative title '*Do women MPs talk too much*'¹⁵, it was found that despite making up only one-third of the backbenchers, women MPs did indeed speak up and had asked more than half the questions fielded in the past 4 years.
95. The top questioner was MP Mdm Halimah Yacob (as she then was, now Minister of State, MCYS) with 180 questions. Coming in third was Sylvia Lim, a female NMP, who has since won an opposition seat in the last elections. Among the NMPs, the top questioner was also a woman, Associate Professor Paulin Tay Straughan, who had fielded 49 questions.
96. Questions fielded by female MPs were reported to cover labour issues, community and social issues, health and sports.

Challenges to implementation of Article 7

11.3. Appointments to full Minister happening too slowly

97. There appears to be a trend of having women MPs being appointed to Ministerial positions in a gradual manner.

⇒ THAT the Government be encouraged to accelerate the promotion of female Parliamentarians to ministerial appointments.

¹⁵ Do women MPs talk too much?: <http://160.96.186.100/lib/pdf/2010/Dec/ST0618.pdf>

11.4. Funding women's groups

98. We would request that there be more government funding of sector-specific women's agencies and there be a comprehensive review of funding policies to improve outcomes in effective advocacy and policy development in working with the various Ministries of the Government, and in undertaking capacity building work among the women's sector.
99. In our consultations with members, it was clear that non-government and community organisations believe their work is under-funded and under-supported, and that funding levels have been static over many years. This has significant ramifications for advocacy for women's rights issues in Singapore, particularly for groups who are structurally hindered from participating in political and public life.

11.5. Women's Leadership and Development grants

100. We would request that there be set up a Women's Leadership and Development Grants Programme, to support innovative programmes being developed by national women's organisations and assist in funding the CEDAW NGO Report consultations and the production of the NGO Reports.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the positive developments in increased women's representation in senior public office and in the Singapore Parliament be welcomed, and the Government be encouraged to consider ways to include more gender diversity in high level positions in government.
- ⇒ THAT the Government commit to ongoing funding for national women's consultative structures (whether this continues to be through the Women's Desk or an improved model), and strengthen its dialogue and interaction with these groups in a sustained manner.

11.6. Participation of women with disability

101. It should be noted that women with disability have little public role in leadership and decision-making.
102. The first difficulty lies with the collection of statistics of persons with disability (PWD)¹⁶. PWDs do make up the Singaporean population but it is unclear what proportion is made up of women. Currently, PWDs are unrepresented in Parliament and other elected offices across the country – their actual numbers in the community not being reflected.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the Government fund leadership, development and mentoring programmes specifically for women with disability and ensure the integration of these women in decision-making positions.

¹⁶ Definition of Disability and Prevalence Rate of Persons with Disabilities in Singapore:
http://www.autism.org.sg/aboutus/reports/enablingMasterplan/EM_Chapter1.pdf

11.7. Funding for development and gender initiatives

103. Funding participation at international levels continues to pose challenges.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government commit to a policy of gender mainstreaming and allocate resources towards gender equity activities.

11.8. Clear articulation of gender architecture

104. It would be useful for the Women's Desk and the IMC on CEDAW to work in collaboration with women representatives like SCWO to produce a national Gender Equality Programme during the next 4 years before the next reporting exercise to articulate Singapore's gender architecture.

105. Such a Programme should provide the rationale and approach of gender integration and set out how the policy will be monitored, evaluated and results reported, with priority outcomes to include improvement to women's:

- economic status;
- participation in decision-making and leadership;
- equitable health and education outcomes.

106. The Programme should also require organisations to evaluate their internal mechanisms, and not just their outreach programmes and services.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government work in collaboration with women's representative groups like SCWO to produce a national Gender Equality Programme to articulate Singapore's gender architecture.

12. Article 8: Participation at the international level

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee in the 2007 Concluding Comments and 2010 List of Questions encouraged the Singapore Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.*
2. *The CEDAW Committee urged the Singapore Government to utilize fully in its implementation of the obligations under the Convention of Beijing Declaration and Platform for action.*

3. *The CEDAW Committee called for the integration of a gender perspective and the explicit reflection of CEDAW principles in all efforts aimed at the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals.*
4. *The CEDAW Committee encouraged Singapore to consider ratifying the treaties to which it was not as yet party, namely: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.*
5. *The CEDAW Committee in its List of Questions also wanted to know what steps Singapore has taken to ratify the Optional Protocol.*

Positive Developments

12.1. Efforts towards realizing Millennium Development Goals

107. ASEAN (of which Singapore is a constituent body) hosted a special development summit in March of 2009, in which ASEAN ratified the Joint Declaration on the Attainment of the MDGs in ASEAN (AMDGA). The AMDGA established a communication and collaboration mechanism between ASEAN and sub-regional programmes, and consolidated preexisting programmes within ASEAN to assist with the implementation of MDGs including: the Framework Plan of Action on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Sustainability. Singapore is currently involved in more than 200 projects related to implementation of the MDGs.

12.2. Singapore's participation at international forums

108. Singapore has hitherto sent high level teams, thus showing strong support and a renewed commitment to Singapore's participation in the international forums such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and to fulfilling Singapore's reporting obligations under CEDAW and other human rights treaties.

13. Article 9: Nationality

Positive Developments

13.1. Amendment to citizenship law

In April 2004, the Constitution was amended to allow overseas-born children to acquire citizenship by descent from Singaporean mothers. This change accorded the same citizenship rights to the children of Singaporean women as those of Singapore men, which resulted in the State lifting its reservation to this Article. This is commendable.

13.2. Availability of assistance in cases of family violence shelters

109. We are also encouraged by the Government's confirmation as recent as April 2011 that crisis shelters, medical treatment, psychological support, counseling, financial aid are available to all victims of family abuse, regardless of nationality¹⁷.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 9

13.3. Lack of assistance to foreign wives, or foreign mothers of Singaporean children

110. One concern expressed by our member organizations is the limited assistance given to foreign women married to Singaporean men when they run into matrimonial problems, when they need to apply for divorce or maintenance for themselves or their children, and in cases of family violence.
111. These are often lower income earning women. Many may not be employed due to their immigration status, although we note from the State report that temporary work passes may be granted to them as against foreigners without family or relatives in Singapore. Even though it is stated that no discrimination is made on basis of gender in such cases, we would suggest that in most instances, the woman, particularly if she is also caring for the children is more vulnerable compared to a foreign man.
112. Although theoretically, these women may avail themselves of the legal system¹⁸, many cannot afford legal representation. However, they will not be able to qualify for civil legal aid under current laws¹⁹.
113. Many also do not qualify for low income rented public housing²⁰ and have to find solutions to their housing problems themselves, particularly if they are not able to return to their home country due to ongoing legal proceedings or having to take care of the needs of their infant or school-going Singaporean children.
114. Another issue identified through our dialogues is that foreign wives particularly those from developing jurisdictions have to wait for a long time before they are granted permanent residency status. We would propose that in the case of foreign women in long marriages with Singapore partners or with Singaporean children, and where there is no reason to believe that the marriage is a sham purely for purposes of securing immigration status, Singapore government accelerate their application for permanent residency.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT the Government evaluate its position on the provision of aid (whether legal, financial or social) to foreign women whose marriages with a Singapore partner have broken down.
- ⇒ THAT the Government evaluate its policy as regards the grant of permanent residency status to foreign women in long marriages with Singapore partners or with Singaporean children

¹⁷ Crisis shelters, medical treatment, psychological support, counselling, financial and legal aid are available to all victims of family abuse, regardless of nationality: <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/PressRoom/aidareavailabletoallvictimsoffamilyabuse.aspx>

¹⁸ Crisis shelters, medical treatment, psychological support, counselling, financial and legal aid are available to all victims of family abuse, regardless of nationality: <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/PressRoom/aidareavailabletoallvictimsoffamilyabuse.aspx>

¹⁹ Legal Aid Bureau - only available to Singapore Citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents: <http://app2.lab.gov.sg/>

²⁰ HDB Press Release on Rental flats - only available to Singapore Citizens: <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10296p.nsf/PressReleases/4404D23AD747E4CB4825755500083DD1?OpenDocument>

14. Article 10: Education

Positive Developments

14.1. *Fruition of lifting of quota on medical school entry*

115. The removal of the quota on number of young women who can be admitted to medical school has seen increasing numbers of women being admitted into medical school at NUS and gender equity in the field.
116. In the case of the new Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, three-quarters of the 26 graduates were women.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 10

14.2. *Education for reintegration*

117. We see education as going beyond efforts towards children and young girls.
118. Singapore is fast-moving towards an ageing population and nowhere is gender segregation more apparent than in middle-aged women who have left the career track, or the elderly who have difficulty coping with technological advancements.
119. Accessible, affordable and relevant vocational education and training, along with person-centred career counseling, is therefore of high significance for women seeking to enter or re-enter the paid workforce. This is especially so for those with limited qualifications, work experience and labour force attachment, and/or training that has resulted in accredited recognition.
120. Similarly, programmes which help the elderly upgrade themselves with computer skills such as those run at SCWO through its IT Hub help older women not just to keep pace with the information age and basic online communication, but to maintain their independence and functionality.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government update and implement a national vocational education, skills upgrading and training policy for women formulated around women-centred principles – in particular, gender equity and inclusiveness – as well as have quantifiable key performance indicators and targeted interventions for disadvantaged groups of women, and associated employment outcomes.

15. Article 11: Employment

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The 2007 Concluding Comments urged the Singapore Government to work towards the withdrawal of its reservation to Article 11, paragraph 1 of the Convention.*
2. *The CEDAW Committee expressed its concern about the rights and freedom accorded to foreign domestic workers (FDWs), especially since they are not covered under the Employment Act, and since the Employment of Foreign Workers Act deals mainly with the issue of work permits.*
3. *The CEDAW Committee called upon the State party to review the legal protection afforded to FDWs and ensure that FDWs benefit from wider protection as well as basic rights and freedom. It was recommended that the State party directly supervise the compliance by employment agencies and employers.*
4. *The CEDAW Committee communicated its concern about the foreign wives of Singapore citizens and their right to work. Accordingly, the State party was recommended to provide a work permit to foreign wives with a social visit pass.*
5. *The CEDAW Committee reiterated its concern about the continuing vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, the persistent wage gap between the genders and the lack of a legal definition and prohibition of sexual harassment.*
6. *The Singapore Government was urged to adopt effective measures to eliminate occupational segregation, ensure that women not covered by the Employment Act are guaranteed full legal maternity leave protection, adopt legislation guaranteeing equal pay for work of equal value and enact legislative provisions on sexual harassment at the workplace.*
7. *The CEDAW Committee noted with concern the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding roles and responsibilities of men and women.*
8. *As such, the CEDAW Committee recommended that the State party ensures that all measures of work-life balance are targeted at both men and women so as to further support the equal sharing of family and work responsibilities between men and women.*

Positive Developments

15.1. Promotion of fair employment practices

121. Singapore's efforts to promote fair employment practices, particularly the establishment of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) in May 2006, are commendable.

15.2. Equalisation of medical benefits in the civil service

122. We welcome the steps taken towards ensuring meritocracy in the civil service, particularly the equalization of the medical benefits for female civil servants on the Medisave-cum-Subsidised Outpatient scheme in 2005. As a result, both male and female civil servants can claim medical benefits for themselves and their dependents.

15.3. Representation of women in boardrooms

123. According to research by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School, women made up 6.8% of all boardroom positions in listed companies in Singapore in 2010, compared to 5.8% in 2009 and 6.6% in 2008.²¹
124. Korn/Ferry International's recent study on board diversity in Asia Pacific revealed that only 6.4% of the directors among the 100 largest home-grown companies in Singapore were women. The corresponding percentages were 11.2% in Australia, 8.5% in Hong Kong, 7.7% in Malaysia, 7.5% in New Zealand and 4.7% in India.
125. While this is far from what a developed country like Singapore should hope to achieve, we acknowledge the slight progress that has been made on this front.
126. We would however note the Parliament in Norway systematically introduced legislation requiring 40% female representation on boards, first in relation to state owned and inter-municipal companies and later for the top 500 publicly-listed companies, with a two-year transition phase in each case. The legislation enabled courts to dissolve companies that did not comply. The targets were achieved by a vast majority of organisations within the two-year period²².
127. New initiatives undertaken by SCWO such as the Women's Register and BoardAgender would also hopefully work towards achieving a better scorecard by the time of the next reporting.

15.4. Rights of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs)

128. We recognize the measures taken by Singapore to better protect the rights of FDWs. For instance, the Employment Agencies Act was passed earlier this year, which will enable the tighter regulation of employment agencies²³. This will ensure that employment agency owners do not take advantage of domestic workers who come to Singapore to work.
129. We also support the Government's decision to not lower the minimum age limit for FDWs²⁴. It was noted that many FDWs already claim to be older than they actually are and lowering the age limit may make this problem worse.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 11

15.5. Gender imbalance in the workforce and Gender wage differentials

Gender imbalance in the workforce

130. As of 2010:
 - a. 51% of Singapore's population was female²⁵

²¹ Press Release by NUS Business School & BoardAgender:

http://bschool.nus.edu.sg/Portals/0/images/CGFRC/Press%20Release_Singapore%20Board%20Diversity%20Index_2011March7.pdf

²² "Government action to bring about gender balance", by Arni Hole, Director General, Ministry of Children and Equality, Norway:
<http://www.womenonboards.org.au/pubs/articles/norway.htm>

²³ Rules on employment agencies tightened: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1104046/1/.html>

²⁴ No to lowering minimum age requirement for maids:

http://www.straittimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_622530.html

²⁵ Singstat – Population Trends 2010: <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/population2010.pdf>

- b. 43.8% of the workforce was female²⁶
 - c. Labour force participation rate²⁷: Females – **56.5%**, Males – 76.5
131. Labour participation rate of females is still well below the participation rate of males. A lot more needs to be done to develop the current flexible work arrangements if this rate is to improve. This is supported by the fact that in 2009, only 57.2% of married females were participating in the workforce²⁸.
132. In 2009, there were more women (63%) than men engaged in sales, clerical and service work²⁹, and fewer women (42%) than men holding managerial or professional positions³⁰. This indicates that there still exist certain classes of occupations that are dominated by one gender or the other, despite women being just as or even better qualified than men. Furthermore, with respect to occupational status, there are a disproportionate number of male employers than female employers³¹.

Gender wage differentials

133. Even in developed countries, there still exists an income gap between men and women (in the US³², for example). To the best of our knowledge, the most recent data available on gender wage differentials in Singapore extends only to 2009³³.
134. According to these data, the wage gap between men and women has been fairly constant from 2005 to 2009, with women earning between 72% and 73.2% of the income earned by men. However, the process of data collection (sample size, whether the sample was representative of the female labour force, etc) is not stated, so the findings are inconclusive and highlight the need for clear and current indicators on wages and gender.
135. The Government report cited reasons such as differences in skills and work experience.
136. SCWO believes that research and analysis of these and other causes of the gender wage differential will lead to the formulation and implementation of concrete and effective measures to rectify the imbalance.

15.6. Work-life harmony

137. During our second dialogue session, a representative from University Women's Association (Singapore) voiced the difficulty faced by female academics in getting tenured when they have children.

²⁶ MOM – Singapore Workforce 2010: http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singapore_workforce_2010.pdf

²⁷ Time Series on Labour Force Participation Rate: <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/economy/hist/labour.html>

²⁸ Women and the economy – Labour Force Participation Rate:

<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/LabourForceParticipationRateMarriedFemales.aspx>

²⁹ Women and the economy – Clerical, Service and Sales Workers by Gender:

<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/ClericalServiceSalesWorkersbyGender.aspx>

³⁰ Women and the economy – Managers, Professionals, Work Proprietors, Technicians and Associate Professionals by Gender:

<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/ManagersProfessionalsWorkProprietorsTechnic.aspx>

³¹ Women and the economy – Employers by Gender:

<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/EmployersbyGender.aspx>

³² The Gender Pay Gap by Industry:

<http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/the-gender-pay-gap-by-industry/?scp=1&sq=women%20and%20salary&st=cse>

³³ Women and Poverty – Average Monthly Earnings by Gender:

<http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/AverageMonthlyEarningsbyGender.aspx>

138. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley found that although more women are obtaining PhDs in science today, many of these women end up abandoning the research track before attaining tenure at any academic institution³⁴. It appears that female academics are unable to handle the time pressures of academia when they have children. The data support these findings: women who are married with young children are 35% less likely to enter a tenure-track position after obtaining a PhD in science than are married men with young children and PhDs in science, married women with young children are 28% less likely than women without children to achieve tenure in the sciences. Moreover, plans to have children affect female postdoctoral scholars more than their male counterparts.
139. In the current economy, employees have to pay a steep price for any time off from work. Those who take more time off work are penalized, in terms of both pay and promotions. A recent study of business school graduates from the University of Chicago found that male and female graduates earn nearly identical salaries at the start of their careers³⁵. However, it is the women who end up taking time off work, which leads to them earning less and being offered fewer promotions than their male counterparts³⁶.
140. We believe that this is an outcome of gender-role stereotypes that continue to prevail, where it is more acceptable for women to halt their careers or allow them to take the backseat to take care of children. Women bear the brunt of having children whereas men with children are barely affected.
141. We note that the studies mentioned above are in the American context; the Singaporean context is probably different since we have more familial support. However, the discrimination faced is likely to be the same. Singapore is currently grappling with low birthrates³⁷, and one of the reasons for this could be that women who want to be successful and competitive in their work feel that in order to achieve this, they may have to give up on having children. This is supported by a global survey done by management consulting firm, Accenture, which found that only 14% of their female respondents said they aimed for top positions in their company, compared to 22% of the male respondents³⁸. The main reason for this was that having such aspirations would mean too many sacrifices on the family front, given the lack of means to achieve a healthy work-life balance.
142. The above points highlight the need for the implementation of sound measures aimed at promoting a healthy work-life balance. SCWO recognizes the efforts made by the Government thus far in educating employers on the benefits of employing work-life practices and providing opportunities to allow them to put these strategies in place. We also acknowledge the State's efforts to raise the quality of childcare centres here³⁹. However, we would like to point out that the main motivation behind this is to promote marriage and parenthood and not to enhance work-life balance among women with small children.
143. However, there is a need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of these measures. To the best of our knowledge, there are no such mechanisms in place as yet so it is hard to determine whether or not they work.

³⁴ Keeping Women in the Science Pipeline:

http://workplaceflexibility.org/images/uploads/program_papers/mason_-_keeping_women_in_the_science_pipeline.pdf

³⁵ Dynamics of the Gender Gap for Young Professionals in the Financial and Corporate Sectors:

http://ws1.ad.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/goldin/files/Dynamics_AEJ.pdf

³⁶ A Labor Market Punishing to Mothers: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/04/business/economy/04leonhardt.html?_r=1

³⁷ Fertility rate here drops to new low:

http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/docs/media/yr2011/P2011/TD_Fertility%20rate%20here%20drops%20to%20new%20low_180111.pdf

³⁸ Fewer women aim to reach for top executive or C-level positions:

http://newsroom.accenture.com/article_display.cfm?article_id=5163

³⁹ Greater effort to improve child care: <http://160.96.186.100/lib/pdf/2010/Mar/ST1127.pdf>

144. Based on the feedback received during our dialogue sessions, it seems as though working women in Singapore have not yet achieved a good work-life balance. Some of the points raised by representatives from our member organizations include:
- a. Women with young children are finding it difficult to get jobs because they are stereotyped as always putting their children before their work. They also find it hard to get a job that will allow them to be free at night or on weekends – they feel they need to be available at those times to take care of their children. Therefore, due to their role as primary caregivers, especially after returning from maternity leave, women are unable to take on high-ranking, demanding jobs and are given menial work to do instead. *[Singapore Association of Social Workers]*
 - b. The childcare leave policy is gender-neutral but if an effort was made, the statistics will show that it is largely women who utilise it. This shows that there is gender stereotyping when it comes to caring roles – the woman is expected to take on childcare responsibility alone. *[AWARE]*
 - c. Some of the “flexible work arrangements” offered by companies are in fact not very different from regular work arrangements. For instance, some firms consider 35 hours a week to be part-time work. Also, no benefits (paid leave, etc) are offered to those engaged in part-time work. *[AWARE]*
145. We would like to extend the argument illustrated in point (c) above with another example. An article published in December 2010 describes a new programme implemented by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) – Little Ones @ Work – that encourages companies to set aside at least one day a year to allow their employees to bring their children to their workplace⁴⁰. This initiative is apparently aimed at promoting “work-life integration at the workplace”. Although we are not told of the effectiveness of this measure, it is likely that working women will not benefit much with regards to striking a good work-life balance. Indeed, some of the work-life initiatives currently in place are not strong enough to make an impact.
146. Companies should be truly committed to helping women stay connected to the workforce while fulfilling their responsibilities as a parent or caregiver by putting in place good flexible work policies. An encouraging, supportive environment for pregnant women and women with young children could result in some women having more children.

15.7. Women not / inadequately protected by legislation

Pregnant women

147. As mentioned in our introduction, SCWO conducted two dialogue sessions with our member organizations to get their views on the issues related to CEDAW. During one of those sessions, a representative from the Singapore Business and Professional Women’s Association (SBPWA) expressed her concern about pregnant women not being sufficiently protected under current employment laws, with respect to job security and prospect for promotions.
148. A recent article in The Straits Times (Singapore’s main daily newspaper) reported that the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) received a total of 84 wrongful dismissal complaints by

⁴⁰ More firms participate in Little Ones @ Work programme:
<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1098211/1.html>

pregnant women in 2010, a drop from the 147 cases received in 2009. This drop was attributed to a greater awareness of the law by both employers and employees⁴¹.

149. While we acknowledge and welcome the drop in the number of pregnancy-related complaints, the fact is that the current legislation is unable to protect the rights of pregnant women sufficiently. We are aware that many cases of wrongful dismissal cases go unreported so the reality may be much worse.
150. We are also concerned about the discrimination that occurs during the recruitment process, where women are asked about their marital status and whether or not they plan to have children.

15.8. Lack of availability of gender-disaggregated data

151. There is an overall dearth of gender-disaggregated data on several issues, as noted in the sections above.
152. The Singapore government should regularly collect and make available such data so that the situation of women with respect to men in the various spheres of society can be analyzed accurately.

15.9. Pay equity in the community sector and 'feminised' work

153. There are ongoing issues in relation to the 'feminisation' of some sectors and professions in Singapore. For example, work in the community sector or in professions such as child care have been under-valued as extensions of work that is done in the home/private sphere, with this under-valuing reflected in consistently low salaries. The community services and social work workforce in Singapore continues to be predominantly female.

15.10. Retirement incomes and older women

154. The pay inequity issues discussed above lead to a long-term disparity in wage-earning power. If the current patterns of age specific earnings prevail into the future, a 25-year-old man would earn a proportionately higher amount compared to the prospective earnings of a 25-year-old woman.
155. A natural consequence of all these factors is a significant disparity in the retirement incomes between men and women. Singapore has a compulsory retirement savings scheme, CPF, to which percentage-based contributions are made from the income of all employees.
156. Overall, men in each age group throughout each time period have had a higher proportion of large CPF balances compared with women. This pushes more women into sole or significant reliance on their own savings or insurance policies. Elderly single female households are at the greatest risk of poverty among the aged population.
157. Additional factors experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse women (such as lowly-paid work opportunities, and relatively recent participation in compulsory CPF) also contribute to their further marginalisation from obtaining adequate retirement income.

⁴¹ Fewer pregnant women fired: http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STISStory_642301.html

Recommendations proposed for the Concluding Comments

- ⇒ THAT gender-disaggregated data on the impact of employment policies on the working population be collected more regularly and that this data is made available to the public. Statistical data on the key indicators of gender equality (e.g. wage differentials) should also be collected and updated on a regular basis.
- ⇒ THAT the Government examine the reasons behind the income gap between the genders and implement practical measures to reduce this gap, with the aim of eliminating it completely.
- ⇒ THAT the Government implement industry-specific measures aimed at promoting better work-life harmony and periodically evaluate their effectiveness.
- ⇒ THAT the Government practise gender mainstreaming when creating and implementing policies.
- ⇒ THAT the Government address the gender disparity in retirement incomes.

16. Article 12: Health

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The 2010 List of Questions raised queries with respect to the coverage of family planning services and education as well as made a request for information on women-specific health programmes.*

Positive Developments

16.1. Gender-sensitive health facilities

158. It has been identified that heart disease not breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women and that even when women exhibit the same symptoms as men, they respond differently. They may attribute chest pains to stress or neck pain to a need for a massage or breathlessness to being out of shape. Men, however, will think it is a heart problem and see a doctor.
159. Moreover, the risk of heart failure in women "skyrockets" after menopause, surpassing the risk in men.
160. With this in mind, the Women's Heart Health Clinic (WHHC) at the National University Hospital, was established and started operating in April 2011 as is a one-stop centre at which women will be treated by female cardiologists and receive integrated care from dieticians, occupational therapists and psychologists. It currently has two cardiologists, serving the clinic, which is also a research and education centre. WHHC is also looking to build a database for research into cardiovascular disease, particularly of Asian women, where data is sorely lacking.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 12

161. Singapore was ranked 14th for health performance and 38th in health expenditure per capita in a 2000 OECD study⁴². Despite the existence of a broad range of policies and programmes in the area of women's health, there are limitations which need to be addressed if women's right to substantive equality in health is to be realised.
162. Issues raised at our dialogue session included healthcare for mature women. However, others felt much of the focus was the older women, with very little focus on health care for young girls and middle-aged women.
163. It was identified that women of different ages are affected by different illnesses, so it is important for younger women to be screened too. This can lead to the early detection of lumps in the breast, for example. Adolescent/pre-teen screening was therefore encouraged. It was however pointed out that younger women with gynecological problems are not eligible for any subsidy.

16.2. National Women's Health Policy

164. We urge the Government to recognise the need for gender equity in health and the need to address health inequities between Singapore women and men and to commit to a National Women's Health Strategy.
165. Only with such a commitment can health inequities between genders be addressed, particularly through identifying the specific health needs and issues of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, ages, and women with disability.

16.3. Health services infrastructure for women with disability and mental illness

166. There has also been no visibility on health care needs of women with disability.
167. Women's experiences of mental health is a public health issue. However, the Singapore Government Report did not deal with the issue of mental health, nor of it in gender-specific terms. This is indicative of the invisibility of gender and women's specific health needs in key Singapore public health policies.
168. Mental disorders are increasingly becoming a leading disease group among women, especially depression and anxiety. For example, in Singapore, women have a relatively higher rate of occurrence of depression than men⁴³. The sex ratio is 2:1. In females, depression is more common in the married than the never-married groups. Women with three or more children below age 14 are more at risk. In males, the single, divorced and widowed are more likely to be depressed.
169. Depression is much more common among those in the lower income group. The retired or unemployed are more likely to be diagnosed with depression. Those living alone are also at a higher risk. Social isolation generates feelings of loneliness such that in times of trouble there is no one to confide in. These disorders must be understood in the *social* context of women's lives, as well as in a biological context; that is, women more commonly experience violence

⁴² Health performance rank by country: http://www.photius.com/rankings/world_health_performance_ranks.html

⁴³ SingHealth – Depression: <http://www.singhealth.com.sg/PatientCare/ConditionsAndTreatments/Pages/Depression.aspx>

(whether physical/emotional/sexual); women bear a disproportionate burden of caring and unpaid work, even where they are simultaneously undertaking paid work; there are higher rates of female poverty and financial insecurity; and, marginalisation and discrimination are also leading factors. Further, depression in women tends to be under-diagnosed, and treated differently – in undergoing treatment for depression, women are significantly more likely to be prescribed antidepressant drugs, sleeping pills and vitamins.

16.4. Reproductive health – sexually transmittable diseases

170. Sexually transmitted infection rates are increasing in Singapore, with HIV infection becoming an increasing threat to women as well as men.
171. The lack of sexuality education in all schools is likely to be contributing to this recent rise in sexually transmitted infection rates, and should be remedied immediately. A National Sexuality Education Curriculum would also help to address the issues of teenage pregnancy and abortion in Singapore.
172. It was also pointed out in our dialogues that unlike young men who go through a total physical fitness examination before entry into National Service, young girls do not have the benefit of a similar check-up which may help identify early ailments and reproductive health issues.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government introduce a uniform National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy, including a National Curriculum on Sexual Health, and better training of general practitioners and health professionals in the provision of youth-based sexual health services.

17. Article 13: Economic and social benefits

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The CEDAW Committee expressed its concern at the plight of certain disadvantaged groups of women: foreign wives, women with disabilities, refugee, asylum seeking and migrant women and women facing issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.*

Positive Developments

17.1. Child care funding

173. We commend the Government's continued commitment to investing in child care support and providing tax reliefs to parents.
174. The funding of all forms of child care – day care, out of school hours and vacation care – be reviewed to ensure that a transparent and equitable approach to financing childcare is developed.

Challenges to the implementation of Article 13

17.2. Meeting concerns of women with family responsibilities apart from children

175. It was surfaced in our dialogues that more needs to be done to help women balance family and caring responsibilities with their search for work by providing them with more flexible opportunities to gain new skills and qualifications. This included not just mothers but single women who are often the main carers of aged or infirm parents or siblings.

17.3. Sole parents

176. Current aid schemes are still inadequate in supporting the needs of women as sole parents. This is often compounded by the fact that divorced mothers often face difficulties in enforcing maintenance orders made either in their favour or for their children.

177. For single mothers with disability, this becomes even more acute.

178. To this extent, current programmes such as those run by the Women's Development Secretariat of NTUC : Back2Work with U Programme which runs on the tenets of recruitment, re-adjustment and retention, and We Care for U which has as its aim to reach out to and assist single mums built greater resilience and independence. SCWO is a partner organization for the latter.

17.4. Housing

179. The increasing rise in housing costs has placed significant strain on social services, resulting in high numbers of people requiring rental accommodation.

180. Severe shortages in the availability of affordable private rental and long waiting lists for public housing across Singapore were reported during our consultations. Further, the particular problems for older women who leave a marriage or relationship later in life in accessing affordable housing with little or no asset base or CPF was flagged, as was the potential for vulnerability of these women to be compounded by mobility and health issues.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government review what if any de facto and de jure discriminatory practices exist in public housing programmes and commit to increased funding, access and availability to various forms of supported housing and accommodation, particularly housing which meets the needs of disadvantaged women.

18. Article 15: Equality before the Law

Positive Developments

18.1. Current laws and practices uphold this Article

181. On this score, we are pleased to report that based on express provisions in the Women's Charter which apply to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, women in Singapore are accorded legal capacity to contract in their own names and administer property and conduct legal proceedings in their own right.

19. Article 16: Marriage and Family Life

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

1. *The 2007 Concluding Comments urged the Singapore Government to work towards the withdrawal of its reservation to Article 16, which it considers to be conflicting with the object and purpose of the Convention.*

2. *The Committee expressed its concern about the existence of the dual legal system of civil law and Shariah law, which it sees to promote continuing discrimination against Muslim women in the field of marriage, divorce and inheritance. As such, it was recommended that the State party remove inconsistencies between the two law systems, ensuring that issues regarding women's rights to equality and non-discrimination are resolved according to the provisions of the convention.*

3. *The Committee called upon the State to enact legislation criminalizing marital rape, defined as the lack of consent of the wife/spouse.*

Positive Developments

19.1. Raising of the minimum age of marriage for Muslim women

182. We commend the amendment made to the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), which raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for Muslim women, aligning it with the minimum age of marriage for non-Muslim females.

19.2. Amendments to the Women's Charter

183. SCWO welcomes the amendments made to the Women's Charter in respect of enhancements to the effective enforcement of maintenance orders.

19.3. Setting up of Maintenance Support Central

184. SCWO is pleased to report that tremendous progress has been made in the setting up of Maintenance Support Central, which will be a one-stop centre that will provide assistance to women claiming monthly maintenance payments⁴⁴.
185. The issue of women not getting their maintenance payments led to the setting up of an SCWO Taskforce on the Effective Enforcement of Maintenance Orders. Based on our research, recommendations were submitted on the function of collection and payment of maintenance already ordered by the Courts. Other measures were also proposed to assist the claimants in tracing the whereabouts of missing defaulters as well as their assets and resources. It was further proposed that current enforcement mechanisms be tightened and enforced more strictly.
186. With the improved enforcement mechanism, SCWO hopes for the development of a greater culture of compliance of maintenance orders, through education of all parties of their rights and obligations, with a clear understanding and appreciation of penalties for default. It is hoped that this will lead to the prompt payment of maintenance ordered and compliance with access rights to children, and a reinforcement of the continuing responsibility of both parents to put the welfare of the children above their personal differences.

20. Violence Against Women

CEDAW Committee consideration of the issue

Marital rape

1. *The CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Comments expressed its concern at the reluctance of Singapore to criminalise marital rape and that proposed law reform recognised it as a crime within very narrowly defined circumstances.*
2. *The CEDAW Committee in its List of Questions also wanted information on measures taken to ensure effective implementation of the above legislation, including the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions as well as the nature of protection provided to the victims.*

Data collection in violence against women

3. *The CEDAW Committee in the 2010 List of Questions wanted information on what data was collected on the incidence of violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence and what trends they reveal.*

Positive Developments

20.1. Amendment to the Penal Code to introduce anti-sexual grooming laws

187. In 2008, the Penal Code was amended to include laws against sexual grooming, recognizing newer trends in the exploitation of children including young girls⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ SCWO – Maintenance Support Central: http://www.scwo.org.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=83

188. In 2010, a local newspaper reported the conviction of a 25-year old man who had who repeatedly plied a 13-year-old girl with requests for sex, as the first person to be convicted for sexual grooming.

20.2. Integrated approach to family violence

189. The Government has undertaken significant work⁴⁶ to reduce violence against women. Some of the most significant achievements include:

- the development of a multi-agency strategy to reduce violence against women;
- significant work by the Singapore Police Force to improve the way they deal with violence against women, including practices which are consistently improved, such as the development of a Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence;
- significant changes to the law in relation violence against women, including the definition to include harassment and the wider definition of family member for both victim and perpetrator.

190. The Singapore experience highlights that it is the combined effect of initiatives across all sectors (law reform, courts, policing, human services, offender programmes, housing, education, prevention) that makes a significant difference in relation to reducing family violence and sexual assault. Consistent messages need to be given across all areas. In addition, coordination between ministers, government departments and community organisations and services has been a critical component of the changes.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT the Government's work in the area of violence against women be welcomed and commended.

Challenges to Implementation

20.3. Housing and family violence

191. The primary Government response to family violence requires both victim and perpetrator to remain in their homes, rather than the victims be supported to stay in their homes with the perpetrators leaving. While legislative provisions exist for the perpetrator of family violence to leave, in practice many of these measures are not implemented.

Recommendations proposed for Concluding Comments

⇒ THAT, in addition to addressing the underlying causes of domestic or family violence, the Government increase funding to shelters and support services that are appropriate to women fleeing situations of domestic or family violence, whilst enforcing laws which assist women escaping domestic or family violence to stay in their homes with the perpetrator leaving.

⇒ THAT the Government adopt systemic responses to address needs of children who have lived with family violence.

⁴⁵ Section 376E, Penal Code (Cap 224): http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-224

⁴⁶ 2009, The Singapore Strategy in Managing Family Violence: http://www.cfps.org.sg/sfp/37/371/371-unit_1.pdf

21. Conclusion

This Shadow Report focuses on the relationship between the Singapore government, and its commitments and obligations under the Convention, and the women's NGO sector.

Women's NGOs are key actors in eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality and are essential to the implementation of the Convention. In both our front-line work and through our research, education, outreach and recommendations, significant contributions to changing and transforming legislation, policy and public practices and perceptions can be made.

Advocating on behalf of service users remains an important function of the women's sector. The women's NGO sector is one of the main mechanisms by which women's needs, experiences and aspirations are voiced to Government.

As political will strengthens, as knowledge deepens and important implementation lessons are learned, as capacity and ownership grows, the environment for women's rights and gender equality in Singapore is showing definite signs of progress. The range of national strategies and positive developments to implement CEDAW highlighted in the SCWO Shadow Report are cause for optimism; not only because they are helping to promote real, positive change in the situation of women in Singapore, but also because they are practical examples of just how to convert commitment on gender equality into concrete action. They exemplify what is working, and what could potentially be replicated or scaled up to accelerate change.

Much has been done in terms of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, despite the broadening constituency within government and civil society that is developing in each country in support of women's rights, the reality is that much more can be done.

The positive developments must continue to expand exponentially in the future to close the gaps and overcome the obstacles that prevent women from the full realization of their rights.

Looking forward, we hope the areas highlighted as challenges would particularly benefit from more concentrated attention and effort in the near future, particularly in terms of seizing new opportunities, and confronting new or persistent barriers to progress.

With the fulfillment of our recommendations in the above Report, we truly look forward to Singapore women and girls being accorded 'equal space, equal voice and equal worth.'

ANNEX 1: List of Member Organizations who participated in SCWO's CEDAW Dialogue Sessions

1st Dialogue Session – 18 February 2011

1.	National Trades Union Congress Women's Development Secretariat	(NTUC WDS)
2.	People's Association Women's Integration Network Council	(PA WIN)

2nd Dialogue Session – 25 February 2011

1.	Association of Women for Action & Research	(AWARE)
2.	Breastfeeding Mother's Support Group (Singapore)	(BMSGs)
3.	Indian Women's Association (Singapore)	(IWAS)
4.	PrimeTime Business and Professional Women's Association	
5.	Society Against Family Violence	(SAFV)
6.	Singapore Association of Social Workers	(SASW)
7.	Singapore Muslim Women's Association	(PPIS)
8.	Singapore Women's Association	(SWA)
9.	Singapore Business & Professional Women's Association	(SBPWA)
10.	Singapore Business & Professional Women's Association (Mandarin Chapter)	(SBPWA-MC)
11.	University Women's Association (Singapore)	(UWAS)
12.	Zonta Club of Singapore	(ZONTA)

SCWO-MCYS Closed-door CEDAW Consultation Session – 14 May 2011

1.	Aidha	
2.	Association of Women Doctors (Singapore)	(AWDS)
3.	Association of Women for Action & Research	(AWARE)
4.	Business & Professional Women's Association (Singapore) 3rd Chapter	(BPWA)

5.	Indian Women's Association (Singapore)	(IWAS)
6.	International Women's Federation of Commerce & Industry	(IWFCI)
7.	International Women's Forum	(IWF)
8.	People's Association Women's Integration Network Council	(PA WIN)
9.	Singapore Association of Social Workers	(SASW)
10.	Singapore Association of Women Lawyers	(SAWL)
11.	Singapore Business & Professional Women's Association	(SBPWA)
12.	Singapore Business & Professional Women's Association (Mandarin Chapter)	(SBPWA-MC)
13.	Singapore National Committee for UN Women	
14.	Singapore Women's Association	(SWA)
15.	Society for WINGS (Women's Initiative for Ageing Successfully)	(WINGS)
16.	Soroptimist International Singapore	
17.	Soroptimist of Singapore International (Garden City)	
18.	The Tsao Foundation	(TSAO)
19.	Women's Business Connection	(WBC)
20.	Zonta Club of Singapore	(ZONTA)