

**STATEMENT BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON,
MINISTER OF STATE,
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
YOUTH AND SPORTS
AT THE EAST ASIA GENDER EQUALITY
MINISTERIAL MEETING,
30 JUNE – 1 JULY 2006,
TOKYO, JAPAN**

Good Morning/Afternoon

**The Honourable Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social
Affairs, Dr Kuniko Inoguchi**

Your Excellencies,

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation applauds Japan for organising this inaugural East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting which brings together key leaders and experts from the East Asian countries to discuss, share best practices, and generate ideas on enhancing the well-being and contributions of women. I am indeed honoured to be part of this significant event.

2 The Singapore delegation would like to place on record our appreciation to the Honourable Dr Kuniko Inoguchi and your staff for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements for this Meeting.

Domestic and International Legislation and Systems Regarding Gender Equality

Principle of Meritocracy

3 Singapore is committed to achieving the goals set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to our obligations as a state party of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). We continue to nurture an enabling environment to give both our men and women equal opportunities to contribute and exercise fundamental freedoms in the political, economic and social spheres. The principle of equality for all persons is enshrined in Article 12 of the Singapore Constitution which states that “All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law”. Men and women are equally valued in Singapore and enjoy equal access to education and healthcare. The principle of meritocracy and equal opportunities for all is the very cornerstone of Singapore society.

4 We protect women, especially those who are vulnerable, from unfair treatment. Women's rights are specifically protected by The Women's Charter. Enacted in 1961, the Women's Charter is a landmark piece of legislation that provides the legal basis for equality between husband and wife. It safeguards women's rights in matters relating to marriage and upon divorce, provides for redress in matters such as matrimonial assets, maintenance and custody of children. It also provides protection for family members from domestic violence and women and girls from sexual offences committed against them.

Role and Function of the National Machinery

5 My Ministry, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, set up the Women's Desk in May 2002 to help us focus on issues of gender equality. It is the national focal point for gender policy issues and for international cooperation pertaining to women. The Women's Desk works with local women's groups to address a wide variety of women's issues.

6 The Women's Desk is the Secretariat to the Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW which monitors the implementation of our obligations under the Convention.

Major Measures and Policies for the Promotion of Gender Equality

7 Singapore has made significant strides forward in the advancement of women. Allow me to share with you some of our key achievements.

More Women In Politics

8 In 2004, our Prime Minister publicly encouraged and invited more women to participate in the local political scene. The recent General Elections held on 6th May 2006 saw an 8% increase in the number of women Members of Parliament. Of the total number of 85 MPs, 17 or 20% of them are women. Four of these 17 women MPs are political office holders. They are Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister of State for Finance and Transport, Ms Grace Fu, Minister of State for National Development, Dr Amy Khor, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Environment and Water Resources. Dr Khor is also concurrently

the Mayor of South West Community Development Council and Chairman of Feedback Unit. And not forgetting myself, as Minister of State for the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Eradication of Domestic Violence and the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons

9 Neither the Singapore Government nor our society tolerates family violence of any form. Through the “Many Helping Hands” approach, Singapore seeks to nurture a violence-free environment through close partnerships with all stakeholders.

10 The Family Violence Dialogue Group, which comprises the Courts, the Prisons, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the National Council of Social Service and non-profit agencies such as the Society Against Family Violence, was established in 2001. This Dialogue Group facilitates work processes amongst the stakeholder agencies, coordinates public education efforts and develops new areas for collaboration.

11 An island-wide National Family Violence Networking System was established in 1996 to provide multiple access points for victims

to obtain help. It is an effective system to link up the Police, Prisons, hospitals, social service agencies, the Courts and my Ministry. This effective system has resulted in timely interventions in the provision of support and care to victims.

12 On the prevention of trafficking in persons, I am pleased to report that in the latest US Trafficking in Persons Report, Singapore was placed in Tier 1. This is in recognition of our full compliance with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Over the past year, the Singapore Government has made significant progress in our efforts to combat trafficking. These efforts include public awareness campaigns to stop child sex tourism. In March 2006, our Parliament approved a law, which when enacted, will criminalize the offence of child sex tourism committed by Singaporeans regardless of consent.

Rectification of Income Gaps Between Men and Women

ILO Convention 100

13 In May 2002, Singapore ratified the ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration to signify our commitment that in the workplace,

men and women have the right to equal remuneration and treatment for work of equal value.

Increasing Female Labour Force Participation

14 Our female labour force participation rate has been rising steadily, reaching 54% in 2004. The average monthly earnings of females increased to 73% in 2004, up 1% from previous years. This is comparable to countries such as Canada and Belgium.

Work Life Harmony

15 To enable women to realize their life ambition to work and have families, the tripartite partners comprising the Government, the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers' Federation, have spearheaded and implemented family friendly policies and initiatives to help women integrate and balance their work and family commitments. The measures include longer maternity leave, childcare leave for parents, infant care subsidies, financial support for the family as well as public education programmes on shared parenting by husbands in the care of children and domestic duties.

16 The Government has also introduced a new WorkSupport programme to help homemakers and low wage workers look after their dependents so that they can return to work. The programme supports such families with enhanced childcare and student care assistance, as well as intensive case management services. There will also be a training grant to help individuals and families increase their earning potential.

17 In addition, Singapore has set aside a \$10 million Work Life Works (WoW!) Fund to help companies and non-profit organisations implement work-life strategies and programmes in the workplace.

Rectification of Education Gaps Between Men and Women

Compulsory Primary School Education

18 All Singaporean children have equal access to quality education. And in 2003, Singapore made six-year primary school education compulsory.

19 I am proud to report that the literacy rate for resident females in Singapore aged 15 years and over stands at 92.7% in 2005. Women today now make up 51% of student intake at our universities.

Conclusion

20 Madam Chairperson, Singapore treasures both women and men as important human capital. The Singapore Government will continue to review and implement new policies that would benefit women. Through regular dialogues with our stakeholders in the public, private and people sectors, we will continue to make further progress in the advancement of Singaporean women and to enhance their participation and contribution in all fields.

21 Thank you.