



**Convention on the  
Rights of the Child**

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**COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**  
**CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES**  
**UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION**

**Initial reports of States parties due in 1997**

**SINGAPORE**

[29 April 2002]

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## **Introduction**

1. Singapore acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 2 October 1995. The Convention came into force on 4 November 1995.
2. This report constitutes the initial report by Singapore as required under article 44, paragraph 1 (a), of the CRC. It covers the period from 1996 to 1998 and up to 2000 in some instances.
3. The report is prepared along the guidelines spelt out in document CRC/C/5, "General guidelines regarding the form and content of the initial reports to be submitted by State parties" dated October 1991.
4. Chapter I of this report provides information on the general situation of Singapore and its approach to the CRC. Chapters II-IX examine the provisions contained in the various articles of the Convention and provides information on Singapore's position in relation to these articles.

### **I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

5. Singapore is a nation State consisting of one main island and some 60 small ones. Located between latitudes 1°09' N and 1°29' N and longitudes 103°36' E and 104°25' E, it is approximately 137 kilometres north of the equator. It is separated from peninsular Malaysia by the Straits of Johor and from the Indonesian islands by the Straits of Singapore.
6. Singapore has a land area of 647.5 square kilometres. The main island of Singapore is about 42 kilometres from east to west and 23 kilometres from north to south. Good integration of land use, infrastructure and planning of transportation is emphasized to optimize land use to meet the needs of different sectors of the community.
7. Singapore has no natural resources except its people. It imports virtually everything the population needs. As such, great importance is placed on developing children who are Singapore's most precious asset. The Government is mindful that policies and programmes should not adversely affect the well-being of families and children, but work to promote their well-being.

#### **A. Demographic characteristics**

8. Singapore's population is made up largely of descendents of immigrants from the Malay peninsula, China, the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. These different ethnic groups have retained their traditional practices, customs and festivals whilst acquiring a distinct overarching common Singaporean identity. As at June 2000, the resident population (Singapore residents and permanent residents) was 3,263,209: 77 per cent were Chinese, 14 per cent were Malays, 8 per cent were Indians and the remaining 1 per cent belonged to other ethnic groups. This multi-ethnic composition of the population shapes every aspect of civil life in Singapore.

**(a) Resident population by age group and sex**

9. Of the total resident population in 1999, 22 per cent (717,300) were aged below 15 years, 70 per cent (2,225,100) were aged 15 to 64 years and 8 per cent (235,100) of the population were aged 65 years and above. The median age of the resident population in 1999 was 33.4 years compared to 29.3 years in 1989. Men made up 50 per cent (1,613,600) of the resident population or a ratio of 1,006 males per 1,000 females.

**Table 1. Singapore resident population by age group and sex, end June 1999**

Thousand									
Sex	Total	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39
Total	3 217.5	233.8	254.5	229.0	209.1	215.3	271.0	291.8	316.5
Males	1 613.6	121.0	131.4	118.3	108.0	107.2	131.9	144.4	160.0
Females	1 603.9	112.8	123.1	110.7	101.1	108.1	139.1	147.4	156.5

Thousand									
Sex	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80 and above
Total	300.8	248.6	179.6	128.7	103.7	83.0	62.6	40.7	48.8
Males	153.2	127.0	90.7	63.9	50.7	39.7	28.9	18.2	19.1
Females	147.6	121.6	88.9	64.8	53.0	43.3	33.7	22.5	29.7

Source: Yearbook of Statistics 2000.

**(b) Percentage of urban population and environmental aspects**

10. Ninety-two per cent of Singapore's residents live in high-rise flats built by the Government. The rest of the population lives mainly in private housing estates. Population density rose from 4,679 persons per square kilometre in 1989 to 5,900 persons per square kilometre in 1999.

11. Singapore is also known as a garden city where the environment is clean and green and residents enjoy a high standard of public health. The air quality in terms of the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) is good on 65 per cent of days and moderate on 35 per cent of days. The overall air pollution levels for 1999 were within the World Health Organization's (WHO) Long Term Goals and the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Standards.

12. The incidence of food- water- and vector-borne diseases is low, and practically all Singaporeans enjoy modern sanitation.

**(c) Life expectancy**

13. Life expectancy has steadily improved from 75.0 years in 1989 to 77.6 years in 1999. Females live longer than males and have a life expectancy of 79.6 years compared to 75.6 years for males.

**Table 2. Life expectancy at birth (1989-1999)**

Year	Total	Males	Females	Years
				Per capita Government expenditure on health (S\$)
1989	75.0	72.9	77.2	210 (US\$ 130) <sup>1</sup>
1994	76.3	74.2	78.5	400 (US\$ 247)
1995	76.4	74.2	78.7	477 (US\$ 294)
1996	76.7	74.6	79.0	484 (US\$ 299)
1997	77.1	75.0	79.2	478 (US\$ 295)
1998	77.4	75.4	79.5	500 (US\$ 309)
1999	77.6	75.6	79.6	464 (US\$ 286)

Source: Yearbook of Statistics 2000.

**(d) Infant mortality**

14. Rising standards of living, health and hygiene have reduced the infant mortality rate from 6.3 in 1989 to 3.2 per 1,000 live births in 1999. In the UNICEF report The State of The World's Children 2001, Singapore was ranked first, together with Japan, Sweden and Switzerland, for the lowest under-5 mortality rate in the world.

15. Improved care of antenatal mothers and neonates has reduced perinatal and neonatal mortality over the years.

**Table 3. Infant mortality rate (1989-1999)**

Year	Per 1,000 live births
	Infant mortality rate
1989	6.3
1994	4.1
1995	3.8
1996	3.6
1997	3.6
1998	4.1
1999	3.2

Source: Yearbook of Statistics 2000.

**(e) Maternal mortality**

16. The maternal mortality rate has fallen from 0.3 in 1970 to 0.17 in 2000 per 1,000 live and still births.

**(f) Fertility rate**

17. The total fertility rate<sup>2</sup> in 1999 was 1,475 births per 1,000 females aged 15-44 years. Singapore's Population Policy encourages higher fertility to reverse the late marriage and childbearing trends by Singaporean couples. However, the total fertility rate is still below the replacement level of 2.1. The age-specific total fertility rates<sup>3</sup> are given below.

**Table 4. Age-specific total fertility rates (1989-1999)**

Age group (years)	Per thousand resident females						
	1989	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
15-19	7.2	7.4	6.5	6.8	6.8	7.5	8.3
20-24	59.7	47.5	47.1	44.7	41.7	39.2	36.5
25-29	129.7	132.7	129.0	125.9	119.1	106.4	105.0
30-34	104.5	111.7	110.0	111.1	109.4	98.1	99.3
35-39	42.1	43.6	42.2	43.7	42.7	40.7	39.4
40-44	7.6	6.9	6.6	7.1	7.2	6.8	6.6
Total fertility rate	1 754	1 749	1 708	1 696	1 635	1 494	1 475

Source: Yearbook of Statistics 2000.

**B. Socio-economic and cultural indicators****1. Standard of living and per capita income/gross national product (GNP)**

18. Standards of living have risen substantially for nearly everyone because incomes have risen faster than costs. In 1998, for every 10,000 people, there were 30 public buses, 1,140 private cars, 14 doctors, 2 dentists, 40 nurses and 3,470 residential telephone lines.

19. Singapore was ranked twenty-sixth out of 175 countries by the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index (HDI) of 1997 which ranks each country according to a score on a composite index integrating per capita gross national product (GNP), life expectancy, literacy and educational levels. In 1999, its GNP at prevailing market prices was S\$ 39,721 (US\$ 24,519). The World Development Report collated by the World Bank ranked Singapore as the fourth richest country in the world for 1997 based on GNP per capita, after Switzerland, Japan and Norway. Singapore's GNP per capita in 1999 was US\$ 22,918.

20. Singapore has a relatively equitable distribution of income. There are no child beggars or children who have to live in the streets because of lack of housing. The average monthly earnings in Singapore were S\$ 2,813 (US\$ 1,736) in 1999. This was a 2.7 per cent increase over the previous year.



**Table 5. Average monthly earnings by industry (1989-1999)**

Industry	1989	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Manufacturing	S\$ 1 243 US\$ 767	S\$ 1 995 US\$ 1 231	S\$ 2 157 US\$ 1 331	S\$ 2 320 US\$ 1 432	S\$ 2 487 US\$ 1 535	S\$ 2 716 US\$ 1 677	S\$ 2 803 US\$ 1 730
Construction	S\$ 1 128 US\$ 696	S\$ 1 865 US\$ 1 151	S\$ 1 941 US\$ 1 198	S\$ 1 971 US\$ 1 217	S\$ 1 991 US\$ 1 229	S\$ 2 143 US\$ 1 323	S\$ 2 226 US\$ 1 374
Wholesale and retail trade	S\$ 1 290 US\$ 796	S\$ 1 945 US\$ 1 201	S\$ 2 080 US\$ 1 284	S\$ 2 203 US\$ 1 360	S\$ 2 319 US\$ 1 431	S\$ 2 539 US\$ 1 567	S\$ 2 561 US\$ 1 581
Hotels and restaurants	S\$ 828 US\$ 511	S\$ 1 160 US\$ 716	S\$ 1 233 US\$ 761	S\$ 1 271 US\$ 785	S\$ 1 303 US\$ 804	S\$ 1 320 US\$ 815	S\$ 1 291 US\$ 797
Transport, storage and communications	S\$ 1 488 US\$ 919	S\$ 2 133 US\$ 1 317	S\$ 2 261 US\$ 1 396	S\$ 2 425 US\$ 1 497	S\$ 2 581 US\$ 1 594	S\$ 2 802 US\$ 1 730	S\$ 2 836 US\$ 1 751
Financial services	S\$ 2 119 US\$ 1 308	S\$ 2 896 US\$ 1 788	S\$ 3 079 US\$ 1 901	S\$ 3 270 US\$ 2 019	S\$ 3 522 US\$ 2 174	S\$ 4 399 US\$ 2 715	S\$ 4 528 US\$ 2 795
Business and real estate services	S\$ 1 675 US\$ 1 035	S\$ 2 336 US\$ 1 442	S\$ 2 485 US\$ 1 534	S\$ 2 596 US\$ 1 602	S\$ 2 731 US\$ 1 686	S\$ 3 004 US\$ 1 854	S\$ 3 056 US\$ 1 886
Community, social and personal services	S\$ 1 621 US\$ 1 001	S\$ 2 286 US\$ 1 411	S\$ 2 369 US\$ 1 462	S\$ 2 472 US\$ 1 526	S\$ 2 576 US\$ 1 590	S\$ 2 811 US\$ 1 735	S\$ 2 955 US\$ 1 824
Total	S\$ 1 398 US\$ 863	S\$ 2 086 US\$ 1 288	S\$ 2 219 US\$ 1 370	S\$ 2 347 US\$ 1 449	S\$ 2 480 US\$ 1 531	S\$ 2 740 US\$ 1 691	S\$ 2 813 US\$ 1 736

Source: Central Provident Fund Board (Yearbook of Statistics 2000).

S\$ 1.62 = US\$ 1.

## 2. Rate of inflation

21. The consumer price index (CPI) measures the price changes over time of a fixed basket of goods and services commonly consumed by households. It rose marginally by 0.4 per cent to 109.2 in 1999, reversing the decline of 0.3 per cent in 1998. Higher costs of food, miscellaneous items, education and health care outweighed lower costs of housing, transport and communications.

## 3. External debt

22. External debts (to, for example, the Asian Development Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) declined from S\$ 173.8 million (US\$ 107.3 million) in 1970 to S\$ 4.7 million (US\$ 2.9 million) in 1994. Singapore has had no external debt since 1996. In 1999, the gross national saving was S\$ 83,568 million (US\$ 51,585 million).

#### **4. Rate of unemployment**

23. Singapore's labour force comprised 1,980,000 people in 1999. The labour force participation rate was 64.7 per cent. The average unemployment rate for the whole of 1999 was 3.5 per cent, which is slightly higher than the 3.2 per cent in 1998.

#### **5. Literacy rate**

24. The literacy rate<sup>4</sup> (number of literate persons for every 100 residents) for the resident population aged 15 years and above rose from 88.4 per cent in 1989 to 93.5 per cent in 1999.

25. Singapore has four official languages, Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. Malay is the national language while English is the language of administration. A fundamental feature of Singapore's education system is the bilingual policy which ensures that each child learns both English and his/her mother tongue so as to maintain an awareness of cultural heritage whilst acquiring the skills to manage in a modern, industrialized economy.

#### **6. Religion**

26. Singapore's Constitution allows every person the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion. The main religions in Singapore are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. The 1995 General Household Survey showed that 85.5 per cent of Singapore residents (2,156,100) aged 10 years and above professed to have some religious faith or spiritual belief, i.e. 31.9 per cent Buddhists, 21.9 per cent Taoists, 15.0 per cent Muslims, 12.9 per cent Christians and 3.3 per cent Hindus.

### **C. General political structure**

#### **1. The evolution of the political system**

27. After nearly 140 years of colonial rule (1819-1959), with the exception of the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, Singapore was granted self-government in 1959. On 16 September 1963, Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia. However, the merger was short lived. Singapore became a fully independent and sovereign nation on separation from Malaysia on 9 August 1965. On 21 September 1965, Singapore was admitted to the United Nations. On 22 December 1965, Singapore became a republic. Mr. Yusof bin Ishak was the first President of the Republic of Singapore elected by Parliament.

#### **2. The framework of the Singapore Government**

28. Singapore is a republic with a parliamentary system of government. The organs of State, i.e. the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, are provided for by a written constitution.

29. The Head of State is the President. The administration of the Government is vested in the Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the other members of the Cabinet are appointed by the President from among its elected members of Parliament. The Cabinet is collectively responsible to Parliament.

### **3. The executive**

30. In January 1991, the Constitution was amended to allow for the election of a President by the citizens of Singapore. The elected President holds office for a fixed term of six years. He is empowered to veto government budgets and appointments to public office. He can also examine the Government's exercise of its powers under the Internal Security Act and religious harmony laws, and in investigations into cases of corruption.

31. The first presidential election was held on 28 August 1993. Mr. Ong Teng Cheong was the first President to be elected by the people of Singapore. The current President, Mr. S.R. Nathan, was elected to office on 1 September 1999.

32. A Council of Presidential Advisers is appointed to advise and make recommendations to the President. The President must consult the Council in some of his functions, for instance, the appointment of key civil servants.

### **4. The Cabinet**

33. The Cabinet is led by the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the President as the member of Parliament who commands the confidence of the majority of the members of Parliament. Ministers are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister and are selected from among the members of Parliament. The Cabinet is responsible for all government policies and the day-to-day administration of the affairs of the State. It is responsible collectively to Parliament and comprises the Prime Minister and ministers in charge of 15 ministries.

### **5. The legislature**

34. The Singapore legislature is made up of the President and Parliament.

### **6. Parliament**

35. Parliament is unicameral. It consists of elected members from single-member constituencies and Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) and Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs).

36. GRCs were created by a 1988 amendment to the Constitution to ensure representation of minority races. Candidates for election in a GRC contest in groups of four to six persons. All members of a group must either belong to a single political party or be independents. Each GRC must have at least one candidate belonging to a minority racial community.

37. Provision for NMPs was made in the Constitution in 1990 to lend wider representation of views in Parliament. The President may appoint up to nine NMPs for a term of up to two years on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee of Parliament. NMPs are persons who have rendered distinguished public service, or who have brought honour to the Republic, or who

have distinguished themselves in the field of the arts, culture, the sciences, business, industry, the professions, social or community service or the labour movement. NMPs are intended to reflect independent and non-partisan views. As at April 1998, two out of the nine appointed NMPs were women.

38. The Constitution also provides for the election of Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMPs). NCMPs are additional members appointed to ensure the representation of a minimum of three members from a political party or parties not forming the Government in Parliament. The number of NCMPs is reduced by one for each opposition party candidate returned.

## **7. The judiciary**

39. Judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court and the subordinate courts. The Supreme Court consists of the High Court and the Court of Appeal. The Judges of the Supreme Court are made up of the Chief Justice, the Judges of Appeal and Judges of the High Court, as well as Judicial Commissioners. There are special provisions in the Constitution to safeguard the tenure of office and the independence of the Judges of the Supreme Court.

## **8. Presidential Council for Minority Rights**

40. The Constitution provides for a Presidential Council for Minority Rights whose particular function is to draw attention to any bill or to any subsidiary legislation which, in its opinion, discriminates against any racial or religious community.

41. The Council also has the general function to consider and report on such matters affecting persons of any racial or religious community in Singapore as may be referred to it by Parliament or the Government.

## **D. General legal framework within which human rights are protected**

42. Singapore was a former British colony. Singapore's legal system, which was largely founded upon the British legal system, has been modified and adapted to suit the nation's needs and circumstances. It is within this legal framework whereby human rights are protected. Any person who is of the view that his legal rights have been infringed can bring an action in the local courts which will then adjudicate upon the issue according to the applicable law in Singapore.

43. The law of Singapore is made up of the Constitution, primary legislation (statutes) and subsidiary legislation (rules, regulations, orders, etc.) made pursuant to powers conferred on the executive in primary legislation. The Constitution lays down the fundamental principles and basic legal framework of the State. It also enshrines the fundamental rights and liberties of the individual vis-à-vis the State. Primary legislation or statutes are laws enacted by the Parliament of Singapore or by predecessor legislative bodies which had the power to enact legislation for Singapore. Subsidiary legislation are rules, regulations or orders made by ministers, in exercising the powers conferred on them by the relevant statutes.

44. Although Singapore's legal system is predominantly based on common law, there is a small degree of legal pluralism, i.e. the application of certain aspects of Islamic personal law to members of the Muslim community.
45. Provisions for the protection of children in Singapore are set out in a number of statutes, i.e. the Children and Young Persons Act, the Women's Charter, the Penal Code, the Adoption of Infants Act and the Guardianship of Infants Act.
46. The Children and Young Persons (C&YP) Act was enacted in 1949 to provide for the welfare, care and protection of children and young persons as well as the treatment and rehabilitation of children and young persons who are beyond parental control or who have committed offences. The Act strikes a balance between family authority and responsibility and the protection of children and young persons by the State. The Act has been amended several times over the years. It was revised in 1993, incorporating enhanced penalties for child abuse. It was further amended in 2001 to widen the options for rehabilitating young offenders. The recent amendments provide greater protection and enhance the well-being of children and young persons who are neglected, abused or destitute and those who are placed in residential institutions.
47. The Women's Charter was considered a landmark piece of legislation when it was enacted in 1961. Its wide range of provisions forms the legal basis for equality between spouses and lowers the barriers to the attainment of equal partnership between husband and wife. It safeguards women's rights in matters relating to marriage, separation and divorce, the custody and care of children, the division of matrimonial assets and maintenance upon divorce or separation. It spells out the responsibility of parents over their children who are minors or who are dependants. It also provides for the protection of women and girls against abuse and exploitation. The Women's Charter was amended in 1996 to give greater protection to family members against family violence and to women and children in a divorce or separation.
48. The Penal Code provides for, among other things, the imposition of imprisonment and/or the imposition of a fine for persons who abuse and neglect children. Details of the three statutes and their concomitant legal provisions governing the care and protection of children are outlined in our responses to the articles of the CRC in this report.
49. There are no special institutions or national machinery with the specific responsibility for overseeing the implementation of human rights. However, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) is the national focal point for the welfare and protection, rehabilitation and development of children. MCDS works closely with all government ministries, the Juvenile Court, the Family Court, children's organizations, non-governmental and other agencies on issues relating to the welfare and interest of children.
50. It must be noted that treaties and conventions do not automatically become part of the law of Singapore. To implement a treaty or convention in Singapore, Parliament has to pass legislation implementing that treaty or convention. The CRC is implemented in Singapore via

various relevant statutes and subsidiary legislation, as explained in the preceding paragraphs. Any person who claims that his rights under the Convention have been violated may invoke before the Singapore courts the relevant provision in the legislation implementing the Convention.

### **E. Dissemination of information on CRC**

51. Following Singapore's accession to the CRC, a press statement was released on 30 November 1995 to inform the public of Singapore's accession. The statement highlighted the CRC as the comprehensive charter on children's rights and the primacy of the child's best interests. Copies of the Convention were made available to newspaper editors for information. A public forum on the CRC was also organized in January 2000 to share the CRC with various groups of NGOs and individuals, including children, and to seek their views on Singapore's position on the CRC.

52. The National Council of Social Service (NCSS), the umbrella body for voluntary organizations, including children's organizations, was also notified of Singapore's accession. Copies of the Convention were also distributed to NCSS and key children's agencies. Discussion sessions were also held with NCSS and children's organizations to brief them and seek their views on the CRC, and to discuss how they can continue to support the interest and well-being of children in Singapore.

53. Singapore's accession was welcomed by the non-governmental organizations. They noted ongoing efforts by Government to look at measures to enhance the welfare of children in Singapore. These organizations disseminated information on the CRC to their clients and the general public.

54. Details on the publicity of the CRC are discussed in other parts of the report, i.e. article 42 under the section on "General Measures of Implementation".

## **II. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION**

55. Singapore is a nation with no natural resources. Our people are our assets and our children are most precious as they are our future. Great emphasis is placed on the well-being of the children and a considerable amount of resources are invested in promoting their interest and potential. Singapore also places great importance on the well-being of the family which is the basic unit of society and the critical environment for nurturing our young. Our policies therefore take into consideration the well-being of children in the context of the family.

56. In 1999, 35 per cent of government operating expenditure was spent on the social and community services sector comprising education, health, environment, public housing and community development. This same sector accounted for 47 per cent of the Government's development expenditure.

57. In accordance with the requirement in the CRC for the establishment of a national mechanism for coordinating policies and monitoring the implementation of the CRC, Singapore has set up the Inter-Ministry Committee on the CRC (IMC-CRC) to look into the

implementation and promotion of the CRC and to report on and monitor its implementation. The IMC-CRC comprises representatives from various government ministries. It seeks the views of the non-governmental sector through the organization of dialogues, forums and workshops on issues pertinent to children and the CRC. The IMC-CRC will extend representation to include more members from among the people in line with the national Singapore 21 vision to create an effective partnership and consultative relationship between the public, private and people sectors.

#### **A. Implementation obligations (art. 4)**

58. As indicated above, international conventions such as the CRC do not automatically become part of the domestic legal system upon Singapore's accession to them. To become part of the legal system, Parliament has to enact legislation to implement the said conventions. However, Singapore would like to reiterate that the principles of the CRC have been implemented in Singapore even prior to Singapore's accession. These are manifested in the legislative and non-legislative framework in place in Singapore. Legislation which reflects the principles and spirit of the CRC in Singapore include the Children and Young Persons Act, the Women's Charter, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Penal Code, among others. Although the CRC itself cannot be invoked before the courts of Singapore, any person can invoke the provisions of relevant State legislation.

59. This legislation is reviewed periodically and amendments have been made to them over the years to enhance the welfare and well-being of Singaporean children and families. Details of the amendments of applicable legislation are mentioned under the relevant articles in this report. Examples of legislation which have been amended are the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), the Women's Charter and the Children and Young Persons Act, as follows:

(a) In 1995/1996, the CPC and the Evidence Act were amended to allow for child witnesses below the age of 16 years to give evidence via live video or television link in criminal and civil cases. These provisions serve to protect child witnesses from the trauma of giving evidence in court and from direct confrontation with the accused in criminal cases;

(b) In August 1996, wide-ranging amendments were made to the Women's Charter. Among the amendments were provisions to enhance the welfare and well-being of children caught in disputes between parents or family violence, and to accord greater protection to victims and family members of victims of family violence;

(c) In 1993 and 2001, the Children and Young Persons Act was amended to enhance the well-being of children and strengthen the protection of children.

60. A range of non-legislative measures covering the areas of education, health and medical services, social services, sports, the arts and culture are in place for the well-being, benefit and protection of children and families. Details of these areas are also elaborated under the relevant articles of this report.

61. Singapore captures a wide range of data and information on matters affecting children. These include data on children in need of care and protection, children who are brought before the juvenile justice system and children between the age of 14 to 16 years who are employed in

industrial undertakings (as required under Regulation 16 of the Employment of Children and Young Persons Regulations); and the state of health and educational status of children, among others. Reviews are conducted to refine data collection and studies are done to improve and identify gaps in services and programmes.

### **Community development and community involvement**

62. The Government seeks to build up the community network to support and strengthen the family. It believes that individuals and groups in the community are capable of and willing to play a role in helping the disadvantaged and those less fortunate than themselves. As such, the Government endeavours to create avenues for the community to bond through volunteerism and social participation in various activities and programmes through its “Many Helping Hands” approach.

63. Singapore’s “Many Helping Hands” approach enables the Government, the voluntary sector, corporate groups and the citizenry to come together to provide a comprehensive range of services, programmes and support throughout Singapore to meet the needs of the community. The services and programmes provided through the “Many Helping Hands” approach address the financial, medical, employment, education, emotional, physical and housing needs of Singaporeans, especially those who are less fortunate. In helping those who are disadvantaged or in need, the approach is to provide assistance to those in need to help them achieve self-reliance, economic independence and productive living and consequently self-esteem and opportunities to progress with the rest of the population. We believe that through this policy of self-help, values such as self-reliance and hard work are encouraged. Such a policy guards against creating a dependence on welfare handouts which can lead to a loss of self-respect, incentive to work and self-determination. For those who are destitute and who by reason of age, illness, disability or special circumstances are unable to work and have no means of subsistence or support, there are various financial and other assistance schemes provided by the Government, grass-roots organizations, corporate groups and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to help them.

64. To support and encourage the involvement of the NGOs in the provision of services and programmes to meet the needs of the community, the Government provides various kinds of support to these organizations. These include:

(a) Release of land, disused government premises or void space in public housing estates for the setting up of facilities for programmes and services;

(b) Provision of a capital grant to meet up to 90 per cent (or up to 100 per cent in some instances) of capital expenditure for the development and furnishing of facilities of approved programmes;

(c) Provision of financial assistance to meet up to 50 per cent (or up to 100 per cent in some instances) of recurrent expenditure for the running of programmes;



(d) Provision of a one-off grant to meet the start-up and initial operating costs of some facilities (such as residential institutions for children, the destitute or elderly) to help non-profit organizations cover the higher costs they would generally incur during the initial period of operation when the facilities are operating well below capacity;

(e) Provision of grants for pre-operational expenditure up to a maximum of three months;

(f) Provision of grants of up to 90 per cent of costs for expenditure on cyclical maintenance of buildings and facilities;

(g) Waiver of payment of Certificate of Entitlement (COE)<sup>5</sup> for the purchase of vehicles needed by NGOs to serve the needs of clients on their programmes;

(h) Waiver or reduction in payment of medical expenses incurred by clients (e.g. children, elderly, and destitute) in residential facilities administered by NGOs; and

(i) Subsidy to pay for rental of premises either partially or fully.

65. These assistance schemes to non-profit organizations are reviewed regularly to assess the need for upward revision of government assistance. Such government assistance enables the NGOs to focus on service delivery instead of being unnecessarily bogged down with fund-raising efforts.

66. The Government works closely with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which is the umbrella body for more than 250 NGOs in Singapore. The NCSS believes that every individual, regardless of abilities and circumstances, deserves the opportunity to maximize his potential and lead a life of dignity in society. It plans, formulates, and reviews social services and social policies and advocates on behalf of its member organizations by making representation to the Government on key issues. It provides, develops and promotes efficient and effective social services and encourages voluntary work to meet current and future needs. It coordinates and guides the development of programmes by its member organizations in five sectors, i.e. disability, health and community, the family, the elderly, and children and youth. To ensure that it is kept updated on issues that concern the sector, research is carried out on an ongoing basis.

67. The NCSS has a fund-raising arm known as the Community Chest. The Community Chest raises funds for over 200,000 disadvantaged people in Singapore. One main fund-raising channel is through SHARE (Social Help and Assistance Raised by Employees), a scheme where employees volunteer to contribute a monthly sum from their salaries to charity. The money raised goes towards helping various groups of people such as the physically or mentally disabled, the elderly, youths-at-risk and disadvantaged families.

### **Support to the international community**

68. Singapore joined the United Nations in 1965. As a State Member of the United Nations, Singapore has continued to contribute actively to discussions at the annual sessions of the

General Assembly, including being one of the co-sponsors of the resolution “Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development” at the fifty-fourth session.

Singapore is deeply concerned with international social issues, and has given its support to organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In 1998 and 1999, Singapore contributed US\$ 743,000 in voluntary contributions to United Nations agencies, e.g. US\$ 600,000 was given to UNDP, US\$ 100,000 to UNICEF and US\$ 40,000 to UNIFEM. The Singapore Chapter of UNIFEM has also started the Bintan Community Project, providing medical, dental and educational assistance to the Indonesian island of Bintan, one of Singapore’s closest neighbours.

69. As a country where people are its only resource, Singapore believes that human resource development is vital for economic and social progress. Through the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), Singapore shares its developmental experience with and provides technical assistance to developing countries. The SCP is inspired by Singapore’s benefit from the training provided by other countries in its early years after independence. Established in 1992, the SCP offers a wide range of training programmes to meet the needs of developing countries. Since then, Singapore has sponsored training courses and study visits for over 7,000 officials from 105 developing countries. Managed by the Technical Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SCP offers two types of technical assistance, namely bilateral and joint training programmes.

#### **Training of medical and health personnel**

70. Singapore has several programmes for training of medical and health professionals from other countries. These range from scholarships to training award schemes. The training extended by the Ministry of Health (MOH) for 1999 include:

- One-month training programme in primary health-care nursing under the Training Award of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for four nurses from Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia;
- Three-month training programme in neonatal intensive care for two nurses from Myanmar and Indonesia;
- One-week study tour on adolescent reproductive health for five officials from China;
- Four-week study programme in neonatal surgery under the WHO fellowship for a doctor from Bangladesh;
- Four-week training in school dental health care for six Vietnamese officials;
- Three-week fellowship training in promoting health in schools for two doctors from China; and
- Nine-month training to obtain a diploma in paediatrics for a Bangladeshi doctor.

## **Early Childhood Care and Development Project**

71. As part of the resolution on the ASEAN Plan of Action for Children, Singapore organized an ASEAN Expert Group Meeting in Singapore from 2 to 4 June 1999 to share its knowledge and expertise in early childhood care and development with ASEAN member countries. The objective was to formulate a framework for minimum standards for childcare services and early childhood curricula, and guidelines for suitable training programmes for implementation by ASEAN countries. The meeting provided a platform for ASEAN member countries to discuss issues related to childcare services and for service providers and policy makers to exchange information. It also provided opportunities to tap into existing networks of training agencies for the training of childcare personnel. The ASEAN Plan of Action for Children has identified the provision of childcare services and the strengthening of the training of childcare providers and trainers as priority areas.

72. Singapore also offers training programmes in early childhood education to other regional countries under the SCP through the Regional Training Resource for Early Childhood Care and Education, Asia, an accredited childcare training agency in Singapore.

### **B. Publicity (art. 42)**

#### **Publicity efforts on the CRC**

73. The principles of the CRC and Singapore's accession to the CRC were publicized widely in the media in 1995. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports, which chairs the IMC-CRC, circulated and promoted the articles of the CRC to NCSS, major voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) and other organizations, particularly those which focus on the welfare of children. It also held dialogues with various organizations to obtain their views on the CRC, Singapore's position vis-à-vis the articles and areas for improvement, amongst other issues. The NGOs were also asked to apply and disseminate the information on the CRC to those whom they help and come into contact with. There is ongoing reference to specific articles of the CRC in project proposals.

74. Various government agencies have also undertaken measures to publicize specific articles relevant to their agencies to members of the public for the protection of children. For example, the Ministry of Manpower has highlighted the need for employers to provide the necessary safeguards for children and young persons in employment in its publication "Guide to the Employment Act", in information leaflets for the public, on its web site and in weekly lectures conducted on the Employment Act. These safeguards include maximum hours of work each day and the type of work allowed.

75. An informative and easy-reading book targeted at children, youth, parents and others working with young people was published in March 1999 by the Singapore Law Society. It is edited by Ms. Suchithra Vasu and it creates awareness of legal obligations and rights of children. Entitled "The Rights of a Minor in Singapore", this book explains the rights of a minor in line with the principles of the CRC. The purpose of the book is twofold. Firstly, it is intended to educate children on their basic legal rights. Secondly, it is intended for parents and teachers to educate children and minors on their basic legal rights for their protection.

76. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has publicized a set of statements on the mission of the Education Service and the Desired Outcomes of Education. The statements are pupil-centred, focusing on the child and outlining the roles expected of each stakeholder (the child, the teacher, the principal, MOE and the community) in helping the child to grow. These statements serve as reference points for all concerned in the development of the child.

77. To raise the awareness of the CRC, MOH has printed the statement, "As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Health Singapore strives to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to a high standard of health-care services" in all health booklets. These health booklets are distributed to the parents and guardians of all babies born in Singapore.

78. The National University of Singapore has also included the CRC in its training for social workers and psychologists. Copies of Singapore's draft initial report on the CRC were also extended to postgraduate students of the National University of Singapore studying the module on Child Welfare Policy for discussion. This module is extended to both the Graduate Diploma and Masters programmes in social work.

### **Other publicity plans**

79. An inter-agency working group has also been set up to look at raising awareness among adults and children on the principles and provisions of the CRC. To publicize the CRC to both adults and children, videotapes, posters, place mats, postcards, instructional manuals and booklets on the CRC have been produced and distributed to schools, childcare centres and VWOs as well as at public exhibitions. The notion of child rights is in place and Singapore will continue to look at measures to make the CRC and Singapore's country report widely known, including applying the various information technology and Internet media.

## **III. DEFINITION OF THE CHILD (art. 1)**

80. The age of majority applicable in Singapore is 21 years old as provided by common law. This section lists the different definitions of "a child" stated in various legislation for specific purposes.

### **Article 1**

#### **Care, custody and maintenance of children**

81. The Women's Charter spells out the responsibilities of parents towards the care of their children who are minors. Section 2 of the Women's Charter defines a "minor" as "a person who is below the age of 21 years and who is not married, or a widower or a widow". For the purpose of custody of children in divorce proceedings or nullity of marriage and for the award of maintenance, section 122 of the Women's Charter defines "a child" as a "child of the marriage who is below 21 years".<sup>6</sup>

### **Protection of children against abuse and neglect**

82. The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the care and protection of children and young persons who are below 16 years of age. The Act protects them from abuse, neglect and abandonment and institutes punishment when adults are careless or neglectful. It also provides for the rehabilitation of children and young persons who commit offences or are beyond parental control. The Act serves to strike a balance between parental responsibility and those of the State. It defines a “child” as a person below 14 years of age, a “young person” as a person who is 14 years and above but below 16 years of age, and a “juvenile” as a person who is 7 years of age or above but below the age of 16 years.

83. The Women’s Charter accords protection to women and girls who are in moral danger or protects them against sexual exploitation regardless of age.

### **Employment**

84. The Employment Act adopts the same definitions as the Children and Young Persons Act for a “child” and a “young person”.

85. Singapore prohibits the employment of children below the age of 12 years. While a child or a young person is allowed to work under the law, Singapore’s labour legislation restricts the type of work the child or young person can engage in and the maximum hours he or she may be employed. A “child” may be employed in industrial work when such undertaking is one which only members of the same family are employed in, and as a workman on any vessel which is under the personal charge of the parent of the child (save for a child employed under an approved apprenticeship scheme). A “child” can only engage in light work in a non-industrial undertaking which is suited to his capacity. A “young person” may be employed in an industrial undertaking provided that the Commissioner of Labour is notified within 30 days from the date of employment. Children and young persons are not allowed to work:

(a) In any occupation, place or working conditions injurious or likely to be injurious to their health; or in any service involving management of, or attendance to, machinery in motion; or in any service involving management of, or attendance to, or proximity to, any live electrical apparatus which is not effectively insulated; or in any underground work;

(b) During the night between 11.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m.;

(c) On their rest days without the permission of the Commissioner of Labour;

(d) More than three hours without a break of 30 minutes or six hours in any one day in the case of a child; and four hours without a break of 30 minutes or seven hours in any one day, inclusive of the period of school attendance (if he/she is attending school) in the case of a young person; and

(e) Unless certified medically fit by a medical practitioner.

86. Practically all children who are below the age of 16 years are either pursuing an education in schools or learning a skill in vocational institutions. So far, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has not received reports or complaints of children who have been exploited or forced to work in industrial undertakings (including factories). Neither has it come across any complaint or contravention of the law prohibiting children below the age of 14 years from working in industrial undertakings. There are also inspections on the employment of children and young persons. A total of 775 inspections were made in 1999 and no cases of infringement were found.

### **Sexual consent**

87. Section 375 of the Penal Code provides that an offence of statutory rape is made out if (among other things) a man has sexual intercourse with a girl even with her consent if she is below 14 years of age. This means that a “child” below 14 years old cannot legally consent to sexual intercourse. Under the Women’s Charter, any person who has carnal connection with a girl below the age of 16 years, except by way of marriage, is guilty of an offence.

### **Marriage**

88. The Women’s Charter governs civil marriages in Singapore. The minimum legal age of marriage in Singapore is 18 years with parental consent. A person below 18 years of age wishing to get married has to apply for a Special Marriage Licence from the Minister of Community Development and Sports before he/she can marry. Any person above 18 years but below 21 years of age is required to furnish his/her parent’s/guardian’s written consent for marriage.

### **Testimony in court**

89. The Criminal Procedure Code accords special protection to child witnesses below 16 years of age. Their testimony can be given through live video or television links from a place outside the courtroom in relation to offences of physical abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse and prostitution. The Evidence Act accords special privilege to child witnesses below 16 years in civil suits for their testimony to be given through live video or television links from a place outside Singapore if both parties had consented to this arrangement and the witness is outside Singapore. The court may also control the persons whom the child witness can see and/or hear during proceedings. This provision enables the court to protect the interests of child witnesses especially if they are afraid of the accused and could be traumatized by the presence of the accused.

90. The court recognizes the vulnerability of witnesses who, because of their age or their involvement in an alleged crime, may be psychologically affected even before they arrive at the court’s doors. It has a Vulnerable Witness Support Programme for children who need to appear before the court. Under the Programme, a support person is assigned to a witness who is deemed vulnerable. The support person will provide non-evidentiary practical and emotional preparation of and support to the child on an individual basis until court proceedings are concluded. This Programme accords special support and protection to:

(a) Any child or young person below 16 years of age who may be a victim of a crime, or a witness to a crime who is required to give evidence in court; and

(b) A victim or witness who is above 16 years of age, but who has a mental age of under 16 years.

### **Consumption and purchase of controlled substances**

91. The Smoking (Control of Advertisement and Sale of Tobacco) Act prohibits the sale or giving of tobacco products to persons under 18 years. The Poisons Act prohibits the sale of poison to persons below the age of 18. Under the Custom (Liquor Licensing) Regulations, it is an offence for a licensee to permit a person under the age of 18 to consume alcoholic liquor at the licensed premises or for someone to purchase alcohol for a person under 18 years at a licensed premises or for the person under 18 years to purchase alcoholic liquor.

### **Age of culpability for offences committed**

92. Section 82 of the Penal Code states that nothing is an offence which is done by a child under 7 years of age. The age of criminal responsibility therefore starts at 7 years of age. Though the age of criminal liability is 7 years, there are safeguards for children up to 12 years. Section 83 of the Penal Code qualifies that in the case of a child between 7 and 12 years, there would be no criminal responsibility if the child has not attained sufficient maturity of understanding to judge the nature and consequences of his conduct on that occasion. As such, children in this category who commit minor offences are normally given a warning and may be referred to a diversionary guidance programme administered by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports for follow-up. For more serious offences, the police will refer the child to a child psychiatrist to satisfy section 83 of the Penal Code before making a decision on whether to charge the offender. The police are guided by clear procedures in dealing with children.

93. Singapore notes that there may be concerns that the age of criminality is set too low as very young children may not understand the offences committed or even appreciate that an offence has been committed by his/her action. This concern has been discussed periodically and extensively by both the Government and non-governmental sectors. It was also raised in Parliament. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports also consulted various government organizations, children's organizations and individual experts and advocates of children in 1999. The general view of most children's organizations and advocates as well as that of the Singapore public is for retention of the present age of criminality in the interest of the child. Most also feel that there are sufficient safeguards to protect young children.

94. It is the view that retention of the current minimum age provides a safety net for young offenders and protects them from exploitation by unscrupulous adults who may want to make use of children for committing offences. It allows for early intervention by social service and other authorities. Singapore has a separate juvenile justice system which adopts a restorative or communitarian model and places emphasis on the best interest of the child. The juvenile justice system recognizes that the complexity of juvenile crime requires the incorporation of elements of deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation, and balances legislative concern for the child's

welfare and its public duty to preserve law and order. It uses a multi-pronged approach that focuses not only on the offender but also the victims. Institutionalization is considered only as a last resort. Children in Singapore are therefore not subjected to the same justice system as adults.

95. The Juvenile Court considers the best use of available dispositions as means to reform and reintegrate the juvenile constructively back into society. In choosing the appropriate order or “instruments of reform”, the Juvenile Court is mindful of the strengths and limitations of the individual offender who appears before it. Notwithstanding the provisions of any other written law, no child or young person can be sentenced by any court other than the High Court to corporal punishment. In deciding the order, the Juvenile Court takes into consideration:

- (a) Rehabilitation and reformation;
- (b) Promotion of education and welfare;
- (c) Removal from undesirable surroundings;
- (d) Compensation of victims;
- (e) Protection of the public;
- (f) Risk of re-offending; and
- (g) Punishment of offender.

96. Not all persons arrested for committing offences are eventually charged in court. In many cases, the police, at the direction of the Attorney-General’s Chambers, administers stern warnings to juveniles or refers them for community-based programmes to help the juveniles and their families, instead of prosecuting them. The number of offenders aged between 7 and 12 years brought before the Juvenile Court averaged about 10 per year for the period 1994 to August 1999. Most of these children are between 11 and 12 years. Even for children who are brought before the Juvenile Court, the preferred treatment modality is community-based treatment, unless the behaviour and circumstances of the juveniles are such that community-based treatment would be inappropriate or unsuitable. (This subject is further discussed under “Special Protection Measures”.)

97. While the Government sees merit in retaining the current minimum age for culpability, it will continue to review its stand, taking into consideration local and global trends and new developments.

### **Institutionalization and imprisonment of offenders**

98. A child below 14 years cannot be sentenced or ordered to be imprisoned for any offence or be committed to prison in default of payment of a fine or costs. A young person below 16 years cannot be ordered to be imprisoned for any offence, or be committed to prison in



default of a fine, damages or costs, unless the court certifies that he/she is of so unruly a character that he/she cannot be detained in a place of detention or an approved school for juveniles. Except for such cases, children who need to be institutionalized are placed in facilities specially set up for the reception, care and rehabilitation of children and not in prison settings.

99. A child offender can be committed to an Approved School or a Young Offenders Section administered by the Prisons Department if his/her behaviour and character are so unruly or depraved that treatment in a juvenile facility is deemed unsuitable. These facilities are set up separately within the Reformative Training Centre, a facility for the treatment of offenders who are above 16 years but below 21 years of age. About 40-50 juveniles are held at the Approved School or Young Offenders Section.

100. Under the Children and Young Persons Act, where a child or young person is convicted of murder, culpable homicide not amounting to murder, attempted murder or voluntarily causing grievous hurt, and the court is of the opinion that none of the other methods by which the case may legally be dealt with is suitable, the court may sentence the offender to be detained for such period as may be specified in the sentence. During that period, the child or young person is liable to be detained in such place on such conditions as the Minister of Community Development and Sports may direct. The child or young person may be released by the Minister on licence which may contain such conditions as the Minister may direct.

101. Under the Penal Code, it is specifically provided that a sentence of death shall not be pronounced on a person convicted of an offence if it appears to the court that he was under the age of 18 years at the time the offence was committed. Such a person shall instead be sentenced to be detained at the President's pleasure. There is no minimum or maximum period of detention. Cases involving such offenders are reviewed internally every four years and a report is forwarded to the Minister of Home Affairs and the President. After the tenth year of detention, the review is carried out annually. The offender may be released on the Order of the President.

### **Consent for medical treatment**

102. In Singapore, the general age of consent for medical treatment has not been definitively stated in the legislation and case law at the moment. Parental consent may not necessarily be required if:

- (a) It is a case of emergency; or
- (b) The child is a case of abandonment, or when the parents cannot be located if a child is not capable of consenting; or
- (c) A pregnant girl below the age of 18 years who is unmarried wishes to terminate her pregnancy.

103. However, unmarried girls below 16 years of age seeking treatment to terminate pregnancies have to undergo compulsory pre-abortion counselling at the Institute of Health to ensure that they are aware of the consequences of their decisions. Pre- and post-abortion counselling are compulsory for all women who request an abortion. Upon completion of the

counselling session, the Institute of Health will issue a Certificate of Attendance (COA). No termination of pregnancy can be performed unless a girl produces a COA. A minimum time lapse of 48 hours is needed after pre-abortion counselling before the pregnant girl can undergo abortion. This is to allow the girl time to review the information she has received and to make a considered and informed decision. Compulsory post-abortion counselling of all abortees is to ensure that they are informed of available family planning methods. (This is also covered below under “General Principles”.)

104. Surgical sterilization can be carried out for a male/female below 21 years of age if he/she is married and gives consent to such treatment. Prior to the treatment, the registered medical practitioner is required to give a full and reasonable explanation as to the meaning and consequences of the treatment.

#### **IV. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

105. In Singapore, the child is precious to both his or her family and the nation. The Government places a very high premium on the education, health and protection of children so that they can realize their full potential, regardless of race, religion or socio-economic background.

106. This chapter discusses the general principles in the areas of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the child’s views in relation to the situation in Singapore.

##### **A. Non-discrimination (art. 2)**

107. Article 12 of the Constitution of Singapore guarantees all Singapore citizens including children, the right to equality and non-discrimination. It states:

(a) All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law;

(b) Except as expressly authorized by the Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens of Singapore on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment. This article does not invalidate or prohibit:

(i) Any provision regulating personal law; or

(ii) Any provision or practice restricting office or employment connected with the affairs of any religion, or of an institution managed by a group professing any religion, to persons professing that religion.

108. This article of the Constitution specifically guarantees Singapore citizens equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.

### **Women and girls**

109. Females, who make up almost half of Singapore's population (50 per cent of the population in 2000), are not regarded as a minority or disadvantaged group. They are given equal access to education, training, employment opportunities and health-care services. They enjoy the same rights and opportunities as males in all sectors based on the principle of meritocracy. The principles of meritocracy and equality are incorporated in the planning and implementation of policies and programmes across government ministries. Both male and female students follow a common curriculum in schools. Females also made up 52 per cent of the university student population in the 1999 intake.

110. In recognition of the equality and importance of the female gender, Singapore signed the "Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region" on 5 July 1988 which aims to promote women's status and enable them to achieve their fullest potential. Singapore also acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 5 October 1995.

111. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports serves as the national focal point and chairs an inter-ministerial committee on the advancement of the status of women. The Singapore Council of Women's Organizations, a non-governmental umbrella body of women's organizations, provides leadership and direction for women's organizations and works in partnership with the Government to promote the effective participation and advancement of women in all fields.

### **Juvenile justice**

112. Police procedure accords special consideration in the handling of children. For example, police officers avoid using force at the point of effecting an arrest. Children are separated from other offenders when detained. Investigations for cases involving children as accused persons are expedited. The general guideline in juvenile justice is to deal with minors without undue delay.

113. During investigations, the police may refer the accused child to the Child Guidance Clinic for an assessment of the child's maturity of understanding. This is especially so in cases where the offence is a serious one, so as to ensure that the level of maturity of understanding of the child is factored into the investigation. For petty offences committed by children, the police can recommend to the Attorney-General that the child be warned and let off or be placed on a community-based programme such as the Guidance Programme.<sup>7</sup>

114. As mentioned above in “Definition of the Child”, Singapore has a separate juvenile justice system for the treatment of children below 16 years of age who commit offences. A social report from a probation officer is called for in all cases brought before the Juvenile Court. The Juvenile Court is also assisted by a panel of advisers comprising private individuals appointed by the President of Singapore and who are experienced or knowledgeable in children’s rights. The advisers advise the magistrate on the treatment and needs of the juvenile before the magistrate decides on the course of rehabilitation for the juvenile.

### **B. Best interests of the child (art. 3)**

115. Article 3 (1) of the CRC states that in all actions concerning children, undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts, administrative institutions or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Article 3 (2) states that States parties should undertake to ensure the child such protection and care necessary for his/her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him/her, and, to this end, take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures. Singapore has entered a declaration on this article, stating that, “the Republic of Singapore considers that a child’s rights as defined in the CRC, in particular the rights defined in articles 12 to 17, shall in accordance with articles 3 and 5 be exercised with respect for the authority of parents, schools and other persons who are entrusted with the care of the child and in the best interests of the child and in accordance with the customs, values and religions of Singapore’s multiracial and multi-religious society regarding the place of the child within and outside the family”. While Singapore agrees that in all our actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration, Singapore is of the opinion that it is in the best interests of the child that the rights conferred on the child by the CRC should also be exercised with respect for the authority of parents and schools and in accordance with the customs, values and religions of the people. While we have entered a declaration, Singapore’s laws and practices take into account and place emphasis on the best interests of the child.

116. Singapore recognizes the family as the fundamental building block of society. It is the nurturing ground for the young and where a child first experiences love, warmth and security, and acquires values and knowledge. In Singapore, where the family size is small, the child is a precious and valued member of the family. Children are also regarded as the country’s greatest assets and the future of the nation. The Government therefore invests a considerable amount of its resources in promoting and safeguarding the interests, welfare and well-being of our children through the family and community.

### **Legal disputes and laws**

117. In legal disputes involving families and children, it is the court’s primary responsibility to protect the interests of children. The court encourages conciliation and cooperation to achieve a consensual outcome which focuses on the welfare of children. The Family Court has a Famcare Centre with court counsellors offering conciliation counselling to couples to help them resolve custody or access disputes. Litigation, which tends to escalate the acrimony between parties, is only used as a last resort.

118. The physical set up of the Court takes into account the needs of children. A children's room with a child minder is available at the Family Court where parents can leave their children while they attend hearings in other parts of the building. This helps to shield children from disputes in court. A Children's Resource Centre for older children at the Family Justice Centre provides information on family cases and counselling to children. The Centre also has a KIDS (Kids in Difficult Situation) Line for children caught in the midst of their parents' marital breakdown, family violence or other family disputes. It provides basic information on how children can cope with their difficulties and where they can seek help.

119. The Children and Young Persons Act has provisions which allow the removal of a child or young person to a place of safety or an approved home, or the placement of the child under the care of a fit person or the supervision of a Welfare Officer, if the parents are unable to provide adequate care for the child.

120. Section 3 of the Guardianship of Infants Act (GIA) states that the welfare of the child shall be the first and paramount consideration in any court proceedings involving the custody or upbringing of a person below 21 years or the administration of any property belonging to or held in trust for that child. The powers of the guardian under the GIA are also limited to ensure that the child's interests are safeguarded. Section 16 of the GIA stipulates that a guardian of the property of an infant shall not, without the leave of the court:

- (a) Sell, mortgage, exchange, or part with the possession of any property of the infant;
- or
- (b) Lease any land belonging to the infant for a term exceeding one year:
    - (i) Any disposal of an infant's property in contravention of this section may be declared void by the judge; and
    - (ii) The court shall not make any order under subsection (i) unless it is necessary or advisable in the interest of the infant.

### **Childcare**

121. Since 1980, the Government, through the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, has promoted and regulated the development and operation of childcare centres for children below 7 years of age, to help working parents who need alternative childcare arrangements for their pre-school children while they work. To safeguard the well-being of children, the Child Care Centres Act and the Child Care Centres Regulations govern the operation of such centres. A childcare centre is defined as any premises at which five or more children under the age of 7 years are habitually received for care. No person can operate a childcare centre without a licence from the Director of Social Welfare.

122. The Director may refuse to issue a licence if he/she is not satisfied as to the character or fitness of the applicant or if the premises do not comply with any requirements relating to health, sanitation or safety of the child. Any person who operates an unlicensed childcare centre or breaches the terms and conditions of the licence is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction

to a fine not exceeding S\$ 5,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or both. The Director can also revoke or suspend a licence for offences committed under the Act. The Director is required to maintain a register of all licensed childcare centres and may enter to inspect such centres.

123. Childcare officers conduct prelicensing visits to new centres to ensure that the legislative requirements are met before they are allowed to operate. All new childcare centres are issued a six-month licence in the first instance. Licences can be renewed up to a maximum period of two years, depending on the performance of the centres. The visits and renewal of the licence are safeguards to ensure that centres provide good care to children.

124. Once a childcare centre is set up, a childcare officer will guide, supervise and provide consultation to the centre. Regular unannounced visits to the centre are made to ensure compliance with the licensing conditions and that a satisfactory standard of care is provided. A Childcare Centre Evaluation Instrument<sup>8</sup> is used to evaluate these centres. Centre supervisors are informed of shortcomings and given advice and/or set conditions for addressing or rectifying them. A copy of the assessment is given to the centre for information and follow-up action. The areas evaluated cover:

- (a) Staffing situation and staff-children ratio;
- (b) Supervisor's qualifications and experience;
- (c) Compliance with legislative requirements in terms of safety, hygiene, nutrition and administration;
- (d) Compliance with conditions for previous licence; and
- (e) Quality of care in the centre which includes centre environment, staff-child interaction and centre-parents relationship, etc.

All complaints against childcare centres are investigated and actions are taken against a centre where necessary.

125. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports also promotes and oversees the development and operation of student care centres (SCCs, also known as before-and-after school care centres) for the care of school-going children up to the age of 14 years. Though SCCs are not licensed, the Ministry sets guidelines for their operation and investigates complaints in the interest and welfare of children.

126. To encourage the development of childcare and student care centres, the Government provides financial incentives and other support to non-profit organizations and employers that develop and operate such centres. These include:

- (a) Release of government or Housing and Development Board (HDB)<sup>9</sup> premises for the setting up of childcare centres;

- (b) Capital grants for the conversion and renovation and for the cyclical maintenance of such premises;
- (c) Non-commercial or subsidized rent for the use of such premises;
- (d) Capital grants for the purchase of furnishings and equipment; and
- (e) General tax advantages for employers for the development and operation of workplace childcare centres.

127. To make childcare and student care centres accessible and affordable to parents, the Government also provides subsidies to working parents (and non-working mothers) who use these centres. For example, the Government provides S\$ 150 or S\$ 75 per child per month for full-day or half-day care programmes respectively to parents using childcare centres. The Government also provides an additional subsidy to low-income families to ensure that these children are not deprived of such facilities. The Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care is a financial assistance scheme for lower-income families, providing monthly subsidy on top of the universal subsidy. It also provides one-off assistance to help families meet the start-up costs of placing their children in childcare centres or counselling care centres (e.g. deposit, uniform, etc.). Subsidy for student care centres are only given to low-income parents and the level of subsidy varies according to the income of parents.

### **Youth activities**

128. On 1 November 1989, the Government set up the National Youth Council (NYC) to coordinate youth affairs at the national level. A minister of State heads the 28-member Council which comprises representatives from various government ministries, statutory boards, youth organizations and the National Council of Social Service and individuals such as members of Parliament, youth advocates and experts. The NYC's mission is to help create opportunities for youth to maximize their potential and enhance their contributions to society. It works in partnership with more than 200 youth groups as well as educational institutions, civic and voluntary organizations and public- and private-sector agencies. The NYC's responsibilities include:

- (a) Keeping policy makers and the public informed about youth issues;
  - (b) Recommending new policies and activities;
  - (c) Acting as a catalyst to spark off and implement new ideas for youth programmes;
- and
- (d) Coordinating youth schemes.

129. NYC has developed a number of infrastructural set-ups to meet the needs of youth and fully engage them in their free time and recreational activities. Among these are a National Youth Centre housing a Youth Park, a one-stop information centre, a Multi-Purpose Hall and

Youth Research Centre. The National Youth Centre offers facilities for performances, carnivals, movie nights, exhibitions and youth outreach activities. These facilities offer youth a place to have good, clean fun.

130. To develop and empower youth, NYC administers an endowment fund, the Youth Development Fund, which provides seed money to help youth initiate and implement projects which benefit the community and society. NYC also runs the Youth Community Initiative Movement to encourage youth to initiate and operationalize their ideas for community service. The Movement is to encourage youth to be more proactive in community service and develop a greater sense of participation and ownership over these initiatives.

131. To better understand the profile and needs of youth and spearhead new initiatives in their best interests, NYC also administers:

- (i) A Youth Research Fund which provides grants for non-commercial surveys and studies that will add to the understanding of local youth trends and profiles;
- (ii) A Repository of Youth Research which enables researchers to make cross-references and check available information before embarking on new studies; and
- (iii) A Youth Research Web Site which facilitates the development of research in youth-related areas of concern and serves as an information centre for cross-references and networking amongst researchers.

132. NYC also organizes forums for researchers to enable interested parties to network and facilitate exchange and cross-fertilization of ideas.

133. An Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC), chaired by a minister of State, aims to support initiatives to reach out to youths before they are exposed to the justice system as well as provide those who have failed with a second chance. IMYC spearheads and steers development programmes for youth-at-risk and forges close partnerships with the community to explore new ways to creatively and constructively support and sustain the development of youth-at-risk. IMYC provides a platform to consider new initiatives for youth services.

134. NYC confers an annual Singapore Youth Award to honour outstanding youths' contributions and achievements. In addition, NYC identifies exemplary youths in Singapore for other local, regional and international awards to internationally recognize and celebrate the achievements of youth. A day is also set aside specially to symbolize the integral role youth play in Singapore's development. Youth Day is celebrated with a wide range of events and participation by schools and youth organizations.



### **C. Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)**

135. Singapore has a good track record in child health and development and has met the targets on child health and development of the World Summit Goals for Children. This is attributed to effective and rigorous implementation of laws, services and programmes which have been put in place to promote the development of children.

#### **Right to life**

136. Persons who at the time of commission of an offence are below 18 years are prohibited from being sentenced to death under the Criminal Procedure Code.

#### **Infanticide**

137. The punishment for infanticide in Singapore is imprisonment for life, or imprisonment for a term which may extend to 10 years, and an additional liability to a fine. The Penal Code does not make a distinction as to the age of the victim: causing the death of a child is no different from causing the death of an adult. However, the Penal Code has a special provision for women who have caused the death of their children because of imbalance of the mind (section 310 of the Penal Code).<sup>10</sup> From 1994 to 1998, there were a total of four cases of infanticide.

#### **Environment control**

138. Singapore is generally pollution free and has a clean and green environment. Residents enjoy a high standard of public health. Singapore's watercourses are relatively pollution free. Dissolved oxygen levels are good, ranging from 2 to 8 milligrams per litre, and support aquatic life. Modern sanitation is available to almost 100 per cent of the population and the incidence of food-, water- and vector-borne disease is low. This high standard is attributed to the successful implementation of environmental management and public health policies.

139. The air quality in Singapore is closely monitored by the Ministry of the Environment. The air quality in terms of the Pollutant Standards Index is good on 65 per cent of the days and moderate on 35 per cent of the days. The overall air pollution levels for 1999 are well within the WHO and United States Environmental Protection Agency standards.

#### **Provision of health-care system**

140. Singapore has a comprehensive health-care system for children, the elements of which are as follows:

(a) There is a network of primary health clinics and hospitals (both private and public);

(b) Government polyclinics provide maternal and child health care which includes a child surveillance programme comprising development screening and immunizations for pre-school children, health promotion activities and curative care;

(c) A School Health Service provides free screening and immunizations, follow-up of students with chronic health problems and health education activities for schoolchildren. Free dental checks are also provided;

(d) Secondary and tertiary health care are also provided for and easily accessible in the government and private sectors;

(e) Singapore also has an epidemiological network for disease surveillance, which also provides inputs to the planning, implementation and monitoring of health-care programmes.

141. Prenatal care is provided at primary health clinics and hospitals. Special precautions are taken for high-risk pregnancies. More than 99 per cent of births are attended to by trained health personnel. The health needs of Singapore children are attended to from the time of conception till they complete their pre-university education (usually aged 18 years). No child in Singapore is deprived of his/her inherent right to live.

142. The Infectious Disease Act (cap. 137) provides for the quarantine and prevention of infectious diseases. The Act and its regulations require compulsory immunization of children against diphtheria and measles. Immunization is provided against tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis and hepatitis B. Child immunization programmes are made available to all children in Singapore through government polyclinics, the School Health Service (SHS) and private hospitals/public hospitals and private practitioners. The public sector administers 60 per cent of immunizations while the rest are carried out by the private health sector. All immunizations in polyclinics and SHS are free except for hepatitis B. The Central Immunization Registry monitors the immunization status of children. Reminder letters are sent to parents of children who have defaulted from immunizations. In 1995, the expanded programme of immunization (EPI) coverage was over 90 per cent for pre-school children, and the immunization coverage for booster diphtheria, tetanus and polio was about 85 per cent for primary schoolchildren.

143. The childhood immunization programme against diphtheria, tetanus and poliomyelitis has been successful. In 1993, 1995 and 1996, no indigenous case of diphtheria, poliomyelitis and neonatal tetanus was reported. Hepatitis B vaccination was introduced for all newborns in 1987. Consequently, the incidence of acute indigenous hepatitis B among children below 15 years decreased from 1.6/100,000 in 1983 to 0/100,000 in 1995. It was 0.4/100,000 in 1996 and 0/100,000 in 1997. Hepatitis B immunization has contributed to a reduction in acute hepatitis B infection from 5.8/100,000 in 1992 to 4.6 in 1993.

### **Registration of deaths of children**

144. Under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, a doctor issues a certificate of cause of death to the informant upon the death of a child. The informant then brings the certificate to the Registry of Births and Deaths for registration and updating of the Registry's database. A death certificate is issued to the informant. For stillbirths, the Act provides for a doctor to issue a notification of stillbirth to the parents. This notification is then used to register the stillbirth.

145. Under the Act, the cause of death is based on the certificate of cause of death issued by a doctor. If the certificate reflects an unnatural cause listed in the list provided by the Department of Pathology, the case will be referred to the State Coroner for confirmation.

### **Physical planning and design**

146. The public housing authority of Singapore, the Housing and Development Board (HDB), aims to provide affordable high-quality housing to residents. The average norm of an HDB dwelling unit per person (including children) is 25 square metres in HDB towns. This living standard is equivalent to other developed countries. A conscious effort is placed on safety measures in the design of HDB flats and the planning of parks and children's playgrounds, to ensure that the standard of living is adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The safety measures provided by HDB are stipulated in the Building Control Regulations. For example, parapet walls are constructed above the recommended height of 0.9 metres under the Regulations. Vertical railings are used in residential blocks to prevent children from climbing over and falling off. All electrical and mechanical systems in HDB buildings are also designed and installed in accordance with the prevailing Codes of Practice.

147. An HDB neighbourhood park, which ranges from 0.4 to 1.5 hectares, is provided for every 5,000-6,000 dwelling units. For new housing estates, public parks of 0.4 to 0.7 hectares are provided for every 1,200-3,000 dwelling units. The parks are located closer to the residents and linked by green connectors. Park facilities include children's play equipment, fitness equipment, a street soccer pitch or 3-on-3 basketball court, shelters, jogging tracks, footpaths, an amphitheatre and pavilion.

148. Children's playgrounds are usually located at the precinct centre and near a childcare centre to facilitate supervision. Play facilities, hard courts and multipurpose courts are preferably located in shady areas within precincts. Sufficient levels of green space and large shady trees are provided around the play facilities and strict safety regulations are imposed, for example:

(a) A children's playground should not be bordered on two or more sides by service roads or near a fire engine access;

(b) The design and manufacture of all proprietary play equipment are required to comply strictly with the various safety standards of their countries of origin. These standards include the American Standards (ASTM F 1487-95), German Standards (DIN 7926) and British Standards, among others. Most of the play equipment used is also certified by the International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association.

### **D. Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)**

149. Article 14 of the Constitution of Singapore states (among other things) that every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression. However, Parliament may by law impose restrictions on this right if it considers them necessary or expedient and in the

interest of the security of Singapore. The rights of the child to express his/her own views in all matters affecting him/her would include issues of custody, care, education, abortion and sexual sterilization. These rights would be elaborated upon under the respective articles.

### **Court proceedings**

150. In Juvenile Court proceedings, the child or young person who is accused of any offence is allowed to give evidence on oath or affirmation or to make a statement if he/she so desires. He/she can also call witnesses to give evidence on his/her behalf (section 42 (6) of the Children and Young Persons Act). When the offence is proven, the child/young person and his/her parent(s) or guardian(s) have the right to say anything in extenuation or mitigation of the penalty. The Juvenile Court has jurisdiction to try all offences that are triable only by a magistrate's court or district court (subject to certain exceptions stated in section 33 (1) of the Act), provided that the accused person has not reached the age of 16 years on the commencement of the hearing of the charge. Under the Criminal Procedure Code, the accused in any hearing in the "normal" courts (i.e. the subordinate courts and High Court) has the right to give evidence in his/her own defence, call witnesses to support his/her defence, cross-examine prosecution witnesses and make a statement setting out his/her mitigation.

151. The views of offenders who are being considered for probation are also taken into consideration by the court. Under section 5 (4) of the Probation of Offenders Act, a Probation Order for a person 14 years and above may only be made if he/she expresses his/her willingness to comply with the requirements of the Probation Order.

### **Custody**

152. Under Singapore laws governing custody proceedings, the views of the child will be heard if he/she is old enough to give an independent opinion. The protections provided under article 14 (1) (a) of the Constitution conform to article 12.

153. Under the Women's Charter (sect. 119 (2)), the court is expected to have regard for the wishes of the parents of the child and to the wishes of the child, where he/she is of an age to express an independent opinion, when deciding the custody of a child. The child is asked for an opinion in custody disputes if he/she is able to speak on the matter. If the court is unsure of the child's views, the dispute is referred to the Ministry of Community Development and Sports for specialist help or support. (See also under article 9 below.)

### **Abortion**

154. A child's right to express views freely in matters pertaining to the child per se is also extended to the act of abortion. Unmarried girls who are below the age of 18 years are entitled to the right of terminating a pregnancy without seeking parental consent. Abortion will be performed as long as the pregnancy is of no more than 24 weeks' duration and if the pregnant girl:

- (a) Is a citizen of Singapore or is the wife of a citizen of Singapore;

(b) Is the holder, or is the wife of a holder, of an employment pass or a work permit pass issued under the Immigration Act; or

(c) Has been resident in Singapore for a period of at least four months immediately preceding the date on which such treatment is to be carried out.

155. The requirement is that unmarried girls below 16 years of age have to undergo compulsory pre-abortion counselling when they seek treatment to terminate pregnancies. This is to ensure that they are aware of the consequences of their decision and given advice, counselling and referral to support services where necessary. Upon completion of the counselling session, the Institute of Health (IOH) will issue a Certificate of Attendance (COA). No termination of pregnancy can be performed unless the girl produces the COA. A minimum time lapse of 48 hours after the pre-abortion counselling is required before the pregnant girl can undergo the abortion. Compulsory post-abortion counselling is also required of all abortees so that they will be informed of available family planning methods. (See also under chapter III, "Definition of the Child".)

### **Sexual sterilization**

156. A registered medical practitioner may carry out treatment for sexual sterilization on any individual below 21 years of age if:

(a) The consent of the individual and his/her parent or guardian are obtained for such treatment if the individual is not married; or

(b) The individual gives consent to such treatment if he/she is married.

Prior to the treatment, the registered medical practitioner is required to convey to the individual undergoing the treatment a full and reasonable explanation as to the meaning and consequences of the treatment.

157. As sexual sterilization involves surgical sterilization of a permanent nature, the State considers that a child's rights defined in article 12 (1) should be in accordance with articles 3 and 5 and be exercised with respect for the authority of parents and guardians who are entrusted with the care of the child. This is in tandem with the Convention's principle that the best interests of the child are always considered.

### **Participation in feedback and expression of opinions**

158. The Government encourages feedback on policies and issues from students through various activities and programmes organized by the Ministry of Education and other bodies. Details of these activities and programmes are covered under the section on freedom of expression in chapter V, "Civil Rights and Freedoms".

159. A Feedback Unit was established in 1985 as part of the Government's efforts to be more consultative. The Unit looks into the views and suggestions of Singaporeans as well as helps explain government policies to Singaporeans. Guided by a supervisory panel comprising

members of Parliament, grass-roots leaders, trade union leaders and representatives from the public and private sectors, the Unit provides several opportunities for Singaporeans to contribute their views and suggestions on national issues and policies. These include feedback channels, feedback groups, feedback sessions, public opinion polls and surveys, information newsletters and web sites.

160. The views of young people are also sought by the Feedback Unit. Examples of these sessions with young Singaporeans and students to gather their comments on national issues and matters affecting them directly include:

- Dialogue session with young Singaporeans on Prime Minister’s National Day Rally Speech (4 September 1996);
- Dialogue session with junior college students on education (2 October 1996);
- Tea session with polytechnic graduates on their aspirations (26 November 1998);
- Dialogue session with young Malays (14 December 1998);
- Dialogue session with young Singaporeans on Prime Minister’s National Day Rally Speech (30 August 1998);
- Polytechnic Feedback Group Meetings (ongoing).

161. NYC organizes and supports national education programmes for young Singaporeans to express their views and discuss current issues facing the nation with national leaders, including the Prime Minister.

162. In November 1998, NYC launched “Channel Y”, a youth communication and outreach programme. Channel Y offers a wide spectrum of activities covering broad-based communication channels for young people to express and exchange views on issues which concern them. Channel Y programmes are designed to promote desired values through creative programmes that reach out to youth of different backgrounds. Its platforms include movie screenings, performances, radio chat-shows, Internet projects and comic projects, among others.

### **Television programmes**

163. There are locally produced children’s programmes which elicit comments from children and youth on national issues or matters directly affecting them. One example of such a programme is “Kids Talk Back”, where children and youth are invited to air their views and opinions and participate in national discussions. The Singapore Broadcasting Authority has also sponsored and promoted the production of children’s programmes that provide wholesome entertainment and information.

## V. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

164. This chapter presents Singapore's position in respect of the following:

- (a) Name and nationality;
- (b) Preservation of identity;
- (c) Freedom of expression;
- (d) Access to appropriate information;
- (e) Freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- (f) Freedom of association and of peaceful assembly;
- (g) Protection of privacy; and
- (h) The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

165. The Singapore Constitution provides that every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression, to profess and practise his religion and to propagate it, and to freedom of association and assembly. However, these rights have to be applied within the limits permitted in the interest of public safety, order, health and morals; and within the constraints of Singapore's geographical size, population density and its resources.

### A. Name and nationality (art. 7)

#### Registration of newborns

166. Under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act (cap. 267) of Singapore, every child born in Singapore must be registered within 14 days after birth and shall be given a name (sections 9 and 10 of the Act). This right to registration and name also applies to a child born out of wedlock. If parents fail to come up with an appropriate name for the child within the time frame, the parents are given 12 months to register the child's name on unnamed birth certificates. There are still some unnamed birth certificates issued in cases where the child had died within 28 weeks after birth.

167. To protect the child and deter parents from not registering the birth of their children, there are penalties in the law. A parent who fails to register a birth without reasonable excuse is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding S\$ 100. Any parent who without reasonable excuse fails to register his/her child with a name within 12 months from the birth of the child is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding S\$ 100 and to a further fine not exceeding S\$ 40 for every day he fails to continue to do so after conviction. To make it easy for parents to register

the birth of their children, the registration of births can be done at most hospitals where the children are born so that parents can do so before the mother and child leave the hospital. The registration of births is not a major problem in Singapore as parents are aware of this responsibility and registration has been made convenient for parents.

### **Nationality**

168. While Singapore has entered a reservation on article 7 in view of its differential treatment of children born outside Singapore to a Singapore citizen mother and non-citizen father, the incidence of rejection for citizenship by parents is rare.

169. The Singapore Constitution grants citizenship on the basis of birth, descent, registration or naturalization. If a child is born in Singapore and his/her parents are legally married at the time of birth, the child will be eligible for citizenship as long as one of its parents is a Singapore citizen. Where a child is born overseas and the parents are legally married, eligibility for citizenship by descent, upon application, will normally be determined by the father's nationality. This is in line with our Asian tradition where husbands are the heads of household.

170. A Singaporean woman married to a foreigner can apply for any of her children to be a Singapore citizen by registration under her own sponsorship. Singapore adopts a non-prejudicial and impartial stand towards citizenship applications, and any deserving applicant (male or female) in his/her own right has the opportunity to obtain citizenship for his/her children. Based on immigration records, the percentages of approvals for citizenship applications by Singaporean fathers and Singaporean mothers for their children born overseas in 1999 are similar: about 75 per cent of these applications were approved. The non-approval of applications include those where parents were unable to provide sufficient documentary proof of their marriage. If an illegitimate child is born in Singapore to a mother who is a Singapore citizen at the time of his birth, the child will be a Singapore citizen by birth. If it is born outside Singapore and the mother is a Singapore citizen, she can apply to register the child as a Singapore citizen.

#### *Persons born on ships or aircraft*

171. Under the Third Schedule to the Constitution, a person born on board a registered ship or aircraft, or on board an unregistered ship or aircraft of the Government of any country, is deemed to have been born in the place in which the ship or aircraft was registered or, as the case may be, in that country.

#### *Abandoned children*

172. There are legal provisions to recognize abandoned children as citizens of Singapore so that they will not be deprived of a nationality. Under the Third Schedule to the Constitution, any newborn found exposed in Singapore and who is of unknown and unascertainable parentage will be deemed a citizen of Singapore by birth and the date of finding shall be taken to be the date of birth of such a child.



*Children born to asylum-seekers and refugees*

173. With limited land and natural resources, and the need to keep our population size manageable, Singapore is unable to be as forthcoming in accommodating refugees as other developed countries with greater physical land area and greater resources. As such, Singapore's immigration policy does not allow the entry and resettlement of refugees or accept anyone who claims to be a refugee. Notwithstanding its position, Singapore had accommodated and facilitated the resettlement of Vietnamese boat people through the setting up of a camp in 1978, i.e. the Hawkins Road Camp which was administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). There were 10 cases of children born to Vietnamese refugees. These children were not Singapore citizens at the time of birth. There were no incidents of children born to asylum-seekers in Singapore. Singapore's position with regard to refugee children is spelt out under article 22, chapter IX, "Special Protection Measures", below.

*Dual citizenship*

174. The Government does not allow Singaporeans to have dual citizenship. Exceptions are made for children who are allowed to hold dual citizenship till the age of 21 years, by which time they will have to decide which citizenship they wish to retain. This issue of dual citizenship was discussed at the Forum on the CRC in January 2000 and dual citizenship was not considered feasible at this point of time because Singapore is still a young nation.

**B. Preservation of identity (art. 8)**

**Preservation of name and nationality**

175. The Registration of Births and Deaths Act allows an applicant to add a surname to a child's name and even allows a child registered without a name to have his/her name registered within seven years of birth. The Act allows a parent or guardian to alter the child's name within 12 months of the birth of the child. No alteration is permitted once a certified extract has been furnished to any party.

**Deprivation of nationality**

176. Under the Singapore Constitution, only a person above the age of 21 years can renounce his citizenship. However, the Government may deprive a child under 21 years of his Singapore citizenship if his/her father has renounced his citizenship or is deprived of his citizenship under article 129 (2) (a) or 134 (1) (a) of the Constitution and the child has obtained citizenship by virtue of being a child of the person who was so registered, or of that person's wife or husband. However, in practice, careful consideration is given to the facts and circumstances of the cases before taking deprivation action, and this provision is rarely used in Singapore.

177. The Singapore Constitution generally does not allow the Government to deprive a child under 18 years of his Singapore citizenship except if the Government is satisfied that the registration was obtained by means of fraud, false representation, or the concealment of any material fact, or was effected or granted by mistake.

### **C. Freedom of expression (art. 13)**

178. Article 14 of the Constitution provides that every citizen of Singapore has (among other things) the right to freedom of speech and expression, but Parliament may by law impose such restrictions as it considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of Singapore.

179. Under the Undesirable Publications Act (cap. 338) and the Films Act (cap. 107), all imported films and publications can be subjected to censorship by the Films and Publications Department before they are allowed into Singapore. Films and publications that are obscene are not allowed. Films which are not obscene and are allowed for public screening are categorized into G (suitable for children), PG (suitable for children with parental guidance), NC-16 and R (A) ratings, with varying degrees of censorship depending on the age of its target audience. Videos and publications meant specifically for children are among the categories exempted from censorship.

180. Singapore's population can receive up to 5 local free-to-air TV channels and 18 local radio stations. The BBC also has a 24-hour FM radio service operating in Singapore. Over and above this, there are 37 cable TV channels in Singapore, of which 32 are foreign channels transmitting "live" through Singapore Cable Vision. These include news channels like CNN International, BBC World, CNBC Asia, as well as children's channels like TNT Cartoon Network, Eureka Learning Channel and Discovery Channel. As at the end of 1999, there were 206,000 cable TV subscribers, representing 23 per cent of all homes. Monthly subscriptions start from an affordable S\$ 33.94 (US\$ 21). With the efficient telecommunications and broadcast networks, even families with modest incomes are able to afford cable television and the Internet.

181. The Government actively encourages the use of the Internet in offices, schools and homes. At the end of 1999, there were over 700,000 Internet users in Singapore, representing over 20 per cent of our population. These numbers will rise further as more schools put in place access to the Internet from primary to tertiary level by 2001.

182. In addition, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) has established a policy framework for the Internet with a view to promoting and facilitating its growth while at the same time maintaining social values. Specifically, SBA adopts a three-pronged approach comprising joint government and industry initiatives and public involvement to encourage Internet development. This approach emphasizes:

(a) Promotion of public awareness of positive aspects and hazards of using the Internet through public education;

(b) Encouragement of the industry to set its own standards through self-regulation;  
and

(c) Institution of a light-touch policy framework in regulating content, which is regularly fine-tuned based on consultation with the industry and the public.

183. Children are free to access information and ideas in all media, including through print, broadcast or the Internet. There are over 5,500 foreign publications and over 4,000 local publications in Singapore, of which 38 are designed for children, such as *Young Generation* and *IT Whiz*. Some of these publications, such as *Friday Weekly*, have students on their reporting team. To encourage the pupils to learn actively, the school curriculum is implemented through strategies that are pupil centred. Pupils are actively involved in expressing their views through oral and written expression and art, and, with the increased use of information technology, the Internet. Pupils are encouraged to be creative and innovative and some have risen to this challenge and have come up with their own innovations.

184. Singapore's education system provides pupils with opportunities to participate in decision-making, particularly so in secondary schools and junior colleges where pupil leaders actively participate in the decision-making process in some areas of school life and college life. The Student Council or the Prefectorial Board forms the apex of the leadership groups in schools. Various co-curricular activities implemented in schools also create leadership opportunities in decision-making at the planning, implementation and review stages of the activities.

185. Freedom of expression among our pupils is encouraged through seminars, debates, the arts, and oratorical and writing activities at different levels. At the Junior College (JC) level, where students are mainly between the ages of 16 and 18 years, there is the JC Debating Championships. Since 1998, these debates are televised. Such debates aim to promote free speech and excellence in debating. The best five speakers from the JC Championships represent Singapore at the annual World Schools Debating Championships which, apart from promoting debating skills and free speech, also promote international understanding as they bring together teams from different parts of the world to debate in places as diverse as Israel, England and Bermuda. The Plain English Speaking Award, a public speaking competition for secondary and pre-university students, gives students the opportunity to express their thoughts on specific topics. They are able to develop self-confidence, poise and thinking skills in the process of delivering prepared and impromptu speeches. Approximately 40 secondary and pre-university students participate each year.

186. Writing activities organized for students encourage them to express their thoughts, feelings and impressions. The Ministry of Education organizes international related competitions and this included the United Nations Fiftieth Anniversary Writing Competition which gave students the opportunity to write poems, letters and essays on the topic of the United Nations and its work. Other writing competitions include the annual Commonwealth Essay Writing Competition and the National Education Exhibition Essay Competition.

187. Since 1970, a pre-university seminar for JC students has been organized annually. It is a five-day residential seminar for about 500 pre-university students aged usually between 16 and 18 years who are immersed in issues presented by eminent politicians and business and community leaders. The students are given the opportunity to ask questions and comment on issues, e.g. developing a knowledge-based economy, promoting bonding within the community and globalization, among others. Students are involved in giving case-study presentations based

on topics presented so that they can discuss these issues in depth. The seminar also enables students to take part in special activities such as outdoor adventure training, workshops on emotional intelligence and various art forms, concert presentations, and meetings with older persons. The themes of the seminar for the last few years included:

- 1995 - Coming of the IT Age
- 1996 - Life Skills for a Changing World, Challenges and Choices
- 1997 - Singapore as Best Home
- 1998 - Going Global, Staying Local
- 1999 - Singapore 21: The Road Ahead

188. An annual Singapore Youth Festival showcases the talent of our students from primary and secondary schools and JCs. Students express themselves artistically in drama, music, dance and art and crafts. In the field of drama, for example, the pupils are free to produce their own play scripts, method of dramatic presentation, and costume and set design.

189. As part of holistic education, Physical Education (PE) plays an important role in developing the physical and social well-being of our students. Through physical activity, PE aims to develop students' motor skills and games skills, and to equip them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to pursue a physically fit and socially healthy lifestyle. In addition, PE fosters self-esteem, promotes teamwork and affords a platform for the students to develop and apply thinking skills in game situations. PE is a compulsory subject in the formal curriculum and the Ministry of Education (MOE) provides guidelines on the number of PE periods to be taught in schools per week:

<u>Levels</u>	<u>Number of PE periods</u>
Primary 1-4	3 periods of 30 min.
Primary 5-6	2 periods of 35-40 min.
Secondary	2 periods of 35-40 min.
Pre-university	3 periods of 45 min.

190. In addition, the Trim and Fit (TAF) programme in schools helps students to improve their level of fitness and to attain and maintain an acceptable weight status. In particular, the National Physical Fitness Award (NAPFA) scheme is adopted to motivate students to attain desirable levels of overall fitness. Medically fit students participate in the NAPFA test every year to assess their fitness levels.

#### **D. Access to appropriate information (art. 17)**

##### **Radio and television**

191. The Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) mandates that the five free-to-air channels (TCS and STV 12, Mediaworks) are to broadcast a total of at least 32 hours of children's programmes per week. The broadcasters, at their own cost, provide for 16 hours of broadcasting, while SBA funds the other 16 hours of programmes per week. Programmes are info-educational in nature, with at least four hours of local production in four languages, i.e. English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Locally produced programmes include popular programmes such as "Kids at Work" (English), "Hip-O" and "Friends" (English), "Little Diaries" (Chinese), "Kids' Camp" (Chinese), "Ya Alif" (Malay), "Jo Kilat" (Malay) and "Kaanbom Karpom" (Tamil). These programmes promote socially desirable and positive values and are developed with a local flavour to perpetuate the diverse cultural heritage of our children.

192. A Children's Programme Advisory Subcommittee assists SBA in monitoring the range, output and quality of children's programmes and in making recommendations on how programmes can be improved. SBA forwards such recommendations to the broadcasters and encourages them to take the necessary action. A children's television seminar was held on 17 September 1999 as part of Singapore's efforts to enhance the quality of children's programmes. Targeted at broadcasters, producers and programmers of children's programmes, the seminar included internationally renowned speakers from the British Broadcasting Corporation, Nickelodeon Global Network Ventures, the Discovery Channel and Australian Children's TV Foundation who shared winning formulae for quality children's programmes.

193. Broadcasters are required to satisfy certain Public Service Broadcast (PSB) requirements according to the licence conditions. (PSB programmes are programmes considered desirable for society but deemed to be less commercially viable and therefore merit consideration for public funding. Children's programmes are included in the PSB programmes.) Broadcasters are also expected to exercise self-censorship based on a set of broad programme guidelines given by SBA. Guidelines for children's TV programmes include:

- (a) Programmes should be wide ranging in genre and context, but avoid gratuitous scenes of violence, horror or sex;
- (b) Stories must generally reflect respect for law and order, parents, elders and fellow human beings. Stories should clearly portray good morals, e.g. hero and villain characters must be distinguishable, and the lifestyles of gangs and gangsters should not be portrayed as desirable;
- (c) Programmes should not contain scenes depicting the consumption of liquor or tobacco products unless an educational point is being made, or unless, in very exceptional cases, the dramatic context makes it absolutely necessary;
- (d) Like all children's programmes, cartoons must avoid excessive violence, especially those featuring humans and human-like characters and depicting realistic story lines (as opposed to clearly fanciful or magical themes);

(e) Programmes should never end in a way that could disturb or negatively affect the emotions of children.

194. Singapore has a Family Viewing Policy to ensure that unsuitable material for children is not broadcast at times when there will be a large audience of young viewers. All programmes broadcast between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. must be suitable for family viewers.

### **Internet**

195. A volunteer Parents Advisory Group for the Internet was formed in 1999 to help parents make the Internet safer for children. Headed by a retired school principal, the group has recruited 65 parents and has received S\$ 50,000 (US\$ 30,864) in funding assistance from SBA. SBA has also worked with the Internet Access Service Providers in Singapore to provide optional family access networks that parents can subscribe to for their children. These networks filter out pornographic as well as other undesirable sites and provide an optional, hassle-free network solution to parents who are unfamiliar with the use of stand-alone filtering software such as CyberPatrol and NetNanny.

### **Books, CD-ROMs and videos**

196. Library services for children are provided by the National Library Board (NLB) through a three-tier system for regional, community and neighbourhood libraries. Besides the regional library at each town centre, there are 16 community libraries. By the year 2003, NLB plans to set up a network of about 100 community children's libraries across the island. This is to enable children below 10 years old to walk to a library from their home easily. Currently, there are 41 such libraries. Through NLB's network of libraries, children in Singapore enjoy free and equal access to library services which are made convenient and accessible to them.

197. The National Library has developed an excellent and wide-ranging collection of books and audio-visual and multimedia materials. The materials are in Singapore's four official languages, and they cater to the varied interests of children from infancy to teenage years. Continuous critical evaluation of the collection is carried out to maintain the effectiveness and quality of the resources. These children's collections are bought from all over the world. NLB does not carry nor promote materials of undesirable content. NLB has not sponsored the production of children's books so far but will carry Singapore published materials when they are available in the market. It takes part in the ASEAN co-publication programme under the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information umbrella to produce children's materials. Four such publications have been produced.

198. NLB's children's libraries are appropriately designed with decor that appeals to children, and are conducive to learning and exploration through print materials, multimedia, online learning resources and the Internet. Innovative ways to keep learning fun and fresh are continually introduced so as to stimulate the children's interest. Children's library membership accounts for 20 per cent of total library membership in Singapore. However, children's book loans make up 50 per cent of total loans. An average of 12 million children's books are loaned a year.

199. The National Library places great emphasis on developing services for children, believing that reading habits are best nurtured from a young age. Reading is basic to lifelong learning, and in line with NLB's mission of expanding the learning capacity of Singapore, its libraries play an important role in nurturing the culture of learning in the young and making reading an enjoyable experience. Specialist children's librarians are continuously being trained to provide quality library services to children, as well as to parents, teachers and childcare specialists. Our libraries have contributed much to the educational and intellectual development of children in Singapore, and complement the formal education provided by the schools. The libraries have also brought much pleasure and delight, enriching the lives of countless generations of Singapore children, some of whom may not have had the means and privilege of owning their own books.

200. The National Library Board also works closely with MOE to cultivate reading among schoolchildren. Regular class visits to the libraries are organized to promote books and reading, and to orientate students to the services provided by the libraries. Under MOE's Community Involvement Programme, students assist with library activities such as storytelling and user education programmes which provide further exposure to libraries.

201. NLB also networks with other organizations that share the same objective of promoting reading such as the National Book Development Council of Singapore and the Society for Reading and Literacy. These organizations jointly organize talks and workshops on reading for parents, as well as storytelling and reading festivals at a national level.

202. In the next five years, the National Library Board will build four more community libraries, and an additional regional library. In addition, a new National Library Building, which is five times larger than the current building, is expected to be ready in 2004 and will house an extensive collection of books. NLB is also forging partnerships with major libraries around the world to provide Singaporeans easy access to library resources worldwide.

### **Information on health**

203. To educate the public as well as promote the importance of health, the National Health Education Department uses a combination of mass media tools and interpersonal strategies to increase awareness, reinforce positive behaviour and change undesirable traits among Singaporeans. The National Healthy Lifestyle Campaign and National Smoking Control Campaign target schoolchildren as well as the general population.

204. Besides general health education programmes targeted at all age groups, special health education programmes are conducted by the School Health Services (SHS) such as talks, health fairs, demonstrations and dissemination of educational materials. Among the topics addressed are diet and nutrition, vision care, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, healthy lifestyles, stress, personal hygiene, growth and development and smoking. In 1998, an online free of charge medical service "Health One", was launched. It is a joint project of the National University of Singapore and National Computer Board to provide Singaporeans with local and world health information. Information is available on the web site in English, Chinese, Malay and, probably, Tamil later. This information is available to children and teenagers as most of them are computer literate and have access to the Internet.

### **Information to young offenders**

205. Young offenders who are placed in institutions are given access to information and reading materials that promote social, spiritual and moral well-being. They are, however, not allowed to have reading materials that incite religious intolerance and those that contain excessive violence and sex.

#### **E. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14)**

206. Singapore's Constitution gives every person, including a child below 18 years, the right to profess and practise his/her religion and to propagate it and many religious faiths are practised in Singapore. However, the right to practise religion has to be applied within the limits permitted in the interest of public safety, order, health and morals. The Penal Code sets penalties for acts of injury or insult to be made in respect of a person's religion. A child under 18 years will receive similar protection under the Penal Code.

207. Pupils wishing to receive instruction on religious knowledge may do so through religious organizations, viz. churches, temples, mosques, etc. The Ministry of Education offers the subject at GCE "O" (General Certificate of Education "Ordinary") and "N" ("Normal") Level examinations to pupils wishing to sit for it.

#### **F. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly (art. 15)**

208. The Singapore Constitution guarantees freedom of association and assembly to every citizen of Singapore. Citizens have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms and to form associations. However, the Government may impose such restrictions as it considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of Singapore or any part thereof or public order or morality. Any law relating to labour or education may also impose restrictions on the right to form associations.

209. Police have imposed restrictions on youths below the age of 16 years from patronizing entertainment outlets that serve alcohol and have facilities for dancing for the following reasons :

(a) Juveniles are impressionable and there is a need to protect them from untoward influences at such entertainment outlets;

(b) They are usually school-going students and should be discouraged from spending too much time at these places; and

(c) Gangs will be prevented from using these entertainment outlets as grounds for gang recruitment and congregation.

210. Statistics from police reports revealed that entertainment outlets serving alcohol with facilities for tea dances and dancing were fertile ground for gang members to congregate and in the process, recruit gang members. Many cases of rioting, unlawful assembly and confrontations involving youths who were gang members arose from petty disputes originating from the activities at such entertainment outlets. These places also provided ample opportunities for naïve



youths to join gangs and to subsequently be involved in undesirable activities. The assembly of juveniles at such entertainment outlets increases the likelihood of and propensity for criminal activity. The subsequent impact of such criminal influence on youths has to be prevented. Hence, in the interest of public order, the age restriction on patronizing entertainment outlets was introduced. Feedback gathered has shown that the general public is of the view that tea dances have an undesirable social influence on youths. School principals, teachers, parents and social workers also share these sentiments.

#### **G. Protection of privacy (art. 16)**

211. Our defamation laws protect honour and reputation. Besides the Defamation Act (which deals with civil claims for defamation), the Penal Code has provisions dealing with defamation as well. Whoever “defames” another (as defined in section 499 of the Penal Code) may be sentenced to imprisonment of up to two years, or be fined, or imprisoned and fined.

212. Confidentiality of the patient is safeguarded in medical practice. However, we do not have legislation protecting people’s privacy. In practice, authorities keeping confidential personal data are usually subjected to obligations of confidentiality. The courts in Singapore are also able to restrict the reporting of cases involving minors by the mass media to protect them.

#### **H. Right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37 (a))**

213. Singapore has entered a declaration stating that article 37 does not prohibit the application of any prevailing measures prescribed by law for maintaining law and order or the judicious application of corporal punishment in the best interests of the child.

214. The Singapore Government believes that every person who commits a crime should be held accountable for his misdeeds. However, a restorative model rather than a punitive model is applied in the juvenile justice system. The rights of children and young persons are protected under the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act, which state that they are to be tried for their offences in the Juvenile Court where a range of treatment and sentencing options are available. Juveniles are tried by the High Court for serious offences such as murder, rape, drug trafficking and armed robbery after they are deemed unsuitable for treatment in the Juvenile Court (section 33 of the Children and Young Persons Act). Juveniles may also be subjected to caning. However, under Singapore’s laws, a juvenile offender will be caned with a light rattan instead of the usual rattan used for adults. Females are not liable to caning (section 231 of the Act). In 1998, there were a total of 20 juvenile offenders who were caned for committing serious offences. As at September 1999, 39 juveniles had been caned.

215. Singapore laws prohibit the sentencing of any child below 14 years to imprisonment for any offence. A young person below the age of 16 years cannot be committed to prisons in default of fine or damages or cost unless the court certifies that he/she is of so unruly a character that he/she cannot be detained in a place of detention or approved school. However, for certain grave offences such as murder, culpable homicide not amounting to murder, or voluntarily causing grievous hurt, he/she may be ordered to be detained in a place of detention.

216. A range of non-custodial options are available to the Juvenile Court for the treatment of offenders under the age of 16 years at the time of the trial. These include:

- (a) Discharging the offender;
- (b) Discharging the offender but entering him/her into a bond of good behaviour and compliance with any order imposed by the Court;
- (c) Committing the offender to the care of a relative or fit person;
- (d) Ordering the offender's parent or guardian to execute a bond to exercise proper care and guardianship;
- (e) Making a probation order requiring the offender to be under the supervision of a probation officer or a volunteer probation officer; and
- (f) Ordering the offender to pay a fine, damages or cost.

217. The death penalty can only be imposed on offenders who are above the age of 18 years at the time of commission of the capital offence. Persons who are below the age of 18 at the time of commission of a capital offence will be detained at the President's pleasure in lieu of the death penalty. They are eligible for consideration for release after serving about 13 years of imprisonment. There is no legal minimum or maximum period of detention. The cases of prisoners detained during the President's pleasure are reviewed internally every four years and the report is forwarded to the Minister for Home Affairs and the President. After the tenth year of detention, the review is carried out on an annual basis. Recommendations for release are made by the Prisons Department and forwarded to the Minister. The prisoner will be released upon an order from the President. (Similar information is also found in chapter III above.)

### **I. General comments**

218. There are avenues for freedom of expression. The Singapore Government has implemented programmes which will provide even more avenues for Singaporeans, including children, to participate in the nation's affairs. The Government aims to let each citizen become a participant in building the Singapore they want for themselves through active citizenry, where major issues can be discussed honestly and robustly, and everyone has a hand in improving policies as well as a stake in their success.

219. The Government notes that rapid developments in technology have enabled Singaporeans to have greater and easier access to information, particularly through the Internet. Every aspect of daily living has been impinged upon, and the Government recognizes a need to protect the well-being of all, especially children, who are the most vulnerable and impressionable. The Ministry of Information and the Arts intends to embark on a study on the implications of these trends for Singapore.

## **VI. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE**

220. Singapore places great importance on the well-being of the family unit. We believe that a strong cohesive family is better able to provide a nurturing environment for the physical, emotional, mental and social development and security of its children and to impart positive values which are crucial for the well-being of society. While emphasis is placed on family responsibility to care and guide its members and kinship support network is encouraged, the Government with the involvement of the community, strives to provide an environment which bolsters the family's capacity to care for and nurture its members. Many of our policies and programmes therefore are pro-family. These policies are deliberately multifaceted, touching all aspects of the Singapore society, to create a total social environment which enables the family to fulfil its care and nurturing roles.

221. There are various multidisciplinary committees that deliberate and review policies and programmes that affect families. It can be said that at any one time, there will be one such committee convened at the national level which has representation from the Government, the community, the private sector and child welfare advocates. Most of these focus not only on public awareness and education programmes but also services for the family and children.

### **A. Parental guidance (art. 5) and parental responsibilities (art. 18, paras. 1 and 2)**

222. Singapore supports the principle that both parents have shared responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. This is manifested in our family practices, social services, programmes and laws. Under the Women's Charter, both parents have a duty to maintain their children during marriage and even after the marriage is dissolved. Maintenance orders can be issued by the Family Court for the benefit of a legitimate as well as an illegitimate child and a child<sup>11</sup> of the family. That the responsibility of parents or guardians is "primary" rather than exclusive suggests that the secondary responsibility lies with the community and the State.

223. Cognizant of the stresses of modern living and the competing demands on parents' time, Singapore is continuously cultivating an environment to support parents in discharging their responsibilities. To promote family life, the Government, through MCDS, implements Family Life Education (FLE) and Parent Education programmes nationwide and designates a week as "National Family Week" each year. Its Family Life and Parent Education programmes aim to promote harmonious and healthy family life. The efforts under the programme include the production of resource materials for the public and for the use of the organizations running such programmes, the regular conduct of talks and workshops on various family issues (including effective parenting) for parents, teachers, social workers and the public, and the promotion of family life. The speakers for the talks and workshops are drawn from a pool of professionals from various disciplines such as social work, psychology, education, child and family development, and counselling.

224. The Government actively promotes the development of Family Service Centres (FSCs), which are one-stop neighbourhood-based social service centres, to support individuals and families in the community. These FSCs provide a range of services such as counselling, advice, information, referral and group work. FLE is one of their core programmes.

225. The dual-income family is a common feature in Singapore today. It therefore becomes important for employers to be more supportive of the family responsibilities of their staff. The Government encourages employers in Singapore to foster a family-friendly work environment. Alternative working arrangements, such as part-time work, contract work, flexible work arrangements, home-based tele-commuting and understanding the occasional need to attend to family emergencies are encouraged among employers. The Government also encourages the development of childcare centres<sup>12</sup> as well as student care centres (or before-and-after school care centres<sup>13</sup>) to cater to the childcare needs of working parents. Through the provision of such facilities and emphasis on family life, the Government hopes to alleviate the burden of working parents, help couples balance work and family life, and support parents in their parenting roles.

226. If a juvenile is beyond parental control or commits an offence, the Juvenile Court (JC) can take several measures to reinforce parental responsibility:

(a) Section 31 of the Children and Young Persons Act empowers the JC to require the presence of parents or guardians in court. It is the JC's practice to require parents to attend with their child and to be heard alongside them;

(b) Where a probation order is made, the JC would invariably order the parents of a juvenile offender to execute a bond to exercise proper care and guardianship under section 44 (1) (d) of the Children and Young Persons Act;

(c) Section 39 of the Children and Young Persons Act empowers the JC to fine the parents for the offending behaviour of their child. A significant principle of this provision is to reinforce parental responsibility for their children. Essentially, the JC has to be satisfied that the parents contributed to the commission of the offence by neglecting to exercise due care of the juvenile before the power may be invoked. It is not intended to punish parents for having delinquent offspring, but seeks to highlight parents' duty to exercise due care of their child. It is the failure to exercise that duty which the JC will punish once the connection between neglect and the delinquency is established;

(d) The JC has also instituted pre-complaint counselling for cases of complaints lodged by parents against children who are reported to be beyond parental control. Such cases are sometimes referred to FSCs for a preliminary assessment on whether FSCs would be able to work with the family and the child without further court intervention. This ensures that parents expend all efforts, with or without external help, in the community before bringing their child into the juvenile justice system for his/her problem behaviour.

227. The JC and MCDS promote awareness of the availability of community-based resources to help parents in the management of their delinquent children to divert such children from the court system.

## **B. Separation from parents (art. 9)**

### **Abuse and neglect**

228. The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the removal of abused children to a place of safety even before they can be brought before a court for the making of an order for their care and custody. It also provides for the taking of a destitute child to a place of safety. Removal of a child to a welfare home is done only as a last resort and to ensure the safety and best interest of the child. Visits by parents to such welfare homes are encouraged to develop the bonding between the child and his/her family.

### **Access to incarcerated parents**

229. Regulation 83 (1) of the Prisons Regulations provides that a child under 3 years of age is allowed to be in the prison with his/her mother. A child, upon attaining the age of 4 years, may also be allowed to remain in prison with his/her mother with special approval from the Minister for Home Affairs. The families of all newly admitted prisoners are briefed on the procedures involved in prison visits. Forfeiture of visits is imposed at the discretion of the superintendent for misconduct. Conversely, the superintendent may, at his/her discretion, permit additional visits under circumstances that warrant special consideration.

230. Social workers from Save The Children Singapore, a voluntary welfare organization, work closely with the Prisons Department to help children of incarcerated mothers. They help them deal with issues such as anger and depression as a result of having a mother in jail. The organization started its outreach programme in 1994 to help female prisoners in Changi prison stay in touch with their families, especially their children. When these children visit their mothers, the social workers engage them in games and activities. They also help trace the children of prisoners and persuade them to visit their mothers in instances where there are strained relations. The organization intends to expand the programme to other prisons and involve other VWOs in Singapore.

### **Divorce/custody proceedings**

231. The welfare of the child is of paramount consideration in divorce proceedings. Section 125 (2) of the Women's Charter provides that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration in deciding in whose custody a child should be placed. The provisions of the Women's Charter aim to provide the best arrangements for a child after the parents' marriage is dissolved.

232. The child is given opportunities to express his views in custody proceedings in accordance with article 12. In practice, the judge takes into consideration the views of the parents and the child if the child is of an age capable of expressing an independent opinion on custody issues. The judge may interview the child to determine his/her wishes before a decision is made. The court may also direct MCDS to investigate and submit a report to assist the court in deciding the best possible arrangement for the child upon the dissolution of a marriage.

233. The court recognizes the child's need to maintain contact with both parents after a divorce. It takes into consideration the effect of a divorce on the children of the marriage, and may make a decree nisi subject to such terms and conditions as it deems fits. The court may not allow a divorce to be made absolute unless suitable arrangements have been made for the children. The court also takes the approach that where one parent is granted custody, reasonable access will be granted to the other parent unless there are strong factors militating against the parent's access to the child.

234. The Family Court enacted the Women's Charter (Parenting Plan) Rules 1997, which came into operation on 1 May 1997. Under the Rules, parenting plans have to be filed together with a divorce application to state what arrangements would be made with regard to the children from the marriage. The plan should state which parent has custody, care and control of the children, access, living arrangements, maintenance and education of the child. Parents are therefore compelled to make suitable plans for the children before they proceed with the divorce. Specifically:

(a) Rule 2 of the Parenting Plan Rules stipulates that the welfare of the child include arrangements in relation to:

- (i) The custody, care and control of, and access to the child;
- (ii) Financial provisions for the child;
- (iii) The education of the child; and
- (iv) Any other parental responsibility for the child;

(b) Rule 3 provides more specifically that parties to the marriage shall try to agree on the arrangements for the welfare of every dependent<sup>14</sup> child of the marriage and to enter into an agreed parenting plan before a petition is filed. If the child's parents are not able to agree on such arrangements, they may choose to seek the advice and assistance of a person who is trained in child-related welfare matters to help them settle on some agreement. Rule 3 (3) states that parents must regard the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration.

235. The Family Court has set up a panel of child advocates to give a voice to children in court for high-conflict custody issues. The court-appointed advocates will interview and advise the child. They will then submit a report which highlights the child's wishes as well as all relevant factors which have not been raised by the parties with the court. This scheme gives cognizance to a child's right to be heard in a case where the outcome affects his/her future. In addition to custody and access orders, the Family Court may also issue "parenting orders" requiring parents to attend parenting classes or counselling after the conclusion of the case. Where appropriate, the court will review the custody orders.

### **C. Family reunification (art. 10)**

236. For 1997, the number of Singaporeans denied passports was only 45 while a total of 450,942 passports were issued. The reason for rejection can be found under the Passport

Regulations. An authorized officer can, at his discretion, refuse the issue of a passport, for example when a Singapore citizen has been convicted by a court of law in Singapore or Malaysia for certain offences like unlawful possession of arms and ammunition, or a Singapore citizen has been admitted into an institution approved by the Minister for Home Affairs for the purpose of treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

237. Under the Immigration Act and the Employment of Foreign Workers Act, non-citizens of Singapore are required to be in possession of a pass or permit before they can enter, remain and work in Singapore. Work permit holders are required to comply with work permit conditions governing employment and marriage in Singapore. These requirements are necessary as Singapore is geographically one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world. Currently, there are more than 450,000 foreign workers, mainly unskilled, in Singapore and there are genuine concerns over the impact that such a large pool of foreign workers can have on Singapore's social cohesion and integration. Singapore therefore accordingly reserves the right to apply such legislation and conditions concerning the entry into, stay in and departure from Singapore of those who do not or no longer have the right under Singapore laws to enter and remain in Singapore, and to the acquisition and possession of citizenship, as it may deem necessary from time to time and in accordance with its laws.

238. Work permit holders who give birth in Singapore without obtaining the approval of the Ministry of Manpower for their marriages are repatriated and placed on entry ban. The child may leave Singapore with the parent on entry ban. If the child remains in Singapore, the child can still maintain regular contact with the parent by visiting the country where the parent is.

#### **D. Recovery of maintenance for the child (art. 27, para. 4)**

239. Singapore has bilateral arrangements for reciprocal enforcement of maintenance orders with the Commonwealth countries, namely the United Kingdom, Guernsey, Jersey, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, the Cook Islands, Western Samoa and St. Vincent. Orders made by courts of other countries may not be directly enforced although arrears may be claimed as debts through civil suits.

240. Under section 68 of the Women's Charter, a parent has to maintain or contribute to the maintenance of his or her children, whether they are in his or her custody or the custody of any other person, and whether they are legitimate or illegitimate. Parents have also to provide children with accommodation, clothing, food and education. If a parent neglects or refuses to provide reasonable maintenance for the child, the court may order the parent to pay a monthly allowance or a lump sum for the maintenance of the child. The court may order a parent to pay maintenance for a child above 21 years if the child is:

- (a) Physically or mentally disabled;
- (b) Serving or will be serving full-time National Service;

(c) Receiving or will be receiving instruction in an educational institution or undergoing training for a trade, profession or vocation; and

(d) Facing special circumstances which justify the making of an order.

241. The application for the maintenance of a child may be made by:

(a) Any person who is a guardian or has the actual custody of the child;

(b) Where the child has attained the age of 21 years, by the child himself;

(c) Where the child is below the age of 21 years, any of his siblings who has attained the age of 21 years; or

(d) Any person appointed by the Minister for Community Development and Sports.

242. If a parent fails to make one or more payments required under a maintenance order, the court may take one or all of these actions:

(a) Direct the amount due to be paid by levying fines;

(b) Sentence him/her to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month for each month's allowance remaining unpaid; or

(c) Make a garnishee order.

A sentence of imprisonment does not affect or diminish the obligation of the parent against whom the maintenance order is made although the court may reduce the amount of payments.

### **E. Children deprived of a family environment (art. 20)**

243. This article accords children deprived of a family environment special protection and assistance from the State and requires the enactment of national laws to ensure alternative care. The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the care of children in need of care and protection and who are destitute. A destitute child can be placed for adoption to willing parties after the assessment of the latter's suitability through social investigation and contact. If the child is not suitable for adoption, alternative care arrangements are made.

#### **Fostering Scheme**

244. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports has had a Fostering Scheme since 1956 for children (including intellectually disabled children) aged 18 years and below. The Scheme allows children deprived of parental care to be cared for in a normal home environment and within the community. It serves as substitute care for children whose parents or guardians are unable to care for them either temporarily or over a considerable period of time. The foster mothers are carefully selected and paid a fostering allowance and an educational allowance for the child. Table 6 shows the placement of children on the Scheme from 1998-2000.



**Table 6: Cases placed in foster care (1998-2000)**

Year	Age (years)	Chinese		Malay		Indian		Others		Total
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
1998	Below 2	2	4	1	1	2	0	4	2	16
	3-5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	6-11	4	1	2	0	1	3	0	0	11
	Above 12	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
	Total	14	7	3	1	3	3	4	2	37
1999	Below 2	2	6	1	3	2	1	1	2	18
	3-5	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
	6-11	3	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	7
	Above 12	4	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	7
	Total	11	10	3	3	3	4	1	2	37
2000	Below 2	6	8	4	3	4	2	2	3	32
	3-5	2	5	2	1	1	0	1	0	12
	6-11	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5
	Above 12	6	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	12
	Total	17	14	9	4	6	5	3	3	61

245. The Scheme works towards planning and facilitating a permanent care arrangement for the child either through discharge to parents or relatives where appropriate; adoption placement or legal guardianship by suitable persons; or placement in a residential institution if foster care is found unsuitable owing to the child's special needs and where his return to his family is not foreseeable. The Scheme is preferred to institutional placement as it lessens the trauma of uprooting the children from a home environment and reduces possible adjustment problems if and when the children return to their own homes subsequently. Placement in a residential institution is always a last resort.

246. A committee comprising individuals and professionals from the community is appointed by the Director of Social Welfare to advise on the placement of children and to review cases under the Scheme.

### **Children's homes**

247. The MCDS also supervises 15 children's residential homes run by VWOs. Six are gazetted as Places of Safety, Approved Homes and/or Approved Schools under the Children and Young Persons Act to admit children placed under statutory orders. Together, these homes provide care for children whose families are unable to give them proper care or who are admitted by the Juvenile Court either for protection or for rehabilitation for offences committed. Different homes admit different categories of children regardless of race, language or religion. The children admitted are:

- (a) From poor, broken or dysfunctional families and in need of shelter;
- (b) Neglected, abused and in need of care and protection;

- (c) Orphaned, destitute or abandoned children;
- (d) Beyond parental control; or
- (e) Placed by the court for offences committed.

248. To support these VWOs in the running of these homes, the Government provides a per capita grant for each child and free medical treatment for the children at all government hospitals and polyclinics. In addition, the Government also provides grants to meet expenses for cyclical maintenance and rental of premises.

249. The children in these homes continue to attend schools and are entitled to recreational outings and visits by parents and relatives. Most of these homes conduct religious, cultural, recreational and social activities for the children. Normalcy of their lives is established as far as possible. Social workers in these homes work with the children to aid their psychological recovery and eventual integration into their own homes where possible.

250. MCDS undertakes periodic review of the various alternative care arrangements with a view to improving services for children in need of alternative care. MCDS, NCSS (the umbrella body for non-government organizations), together with representatives from children's homes, have formulated guidelines to ensure standards of care in children's homes. While it is noted that the level of care in children's homes run by VWOs is generally good and the management of these homes genuinely committed to the well-being and welfare of children under their care, MCDS, NCSS and VWOs see the need for standards to be set against which the homes can measure their standards and to ensure the well-being of children.

#### **F. Adoption (art. 21)**

251. The Adoption of Children Act (cap. 4) governs adoption procedures in Singapore. Before the court makes an order for adoption, the court must be satisfied that the adoption order is for the welfare of the child, with due consideration given to the wishes of the child, his age and understanding. Adoption orders can only be made in Singapore by the court under the Act. The Attorney-General or any fit and proper person appointed by the court acts as guardian ad litem to a child concerning whom an application for adoption has been made. Investigations are conducted by child welfare officers of MCDS on behalf of the guardian ad litem. Consent to place the child for adoption is required from the parents or guardians or persons who have custody or are liable to contribute to the support of the child (sect. 4 (4)). The consent is in a prescribed form and must be attested by a solicitor, a commissioner for oaths, a notary public, or any person for the time being authorized by law in the place where the document is executed to administer oaths. This ensures that the natural parents/guardians fully understand the nature and effect of an adoption order.

252. In tandem with the intention to protect the interests of the child, the dispensation of parental consent is allowed in some cases, i.e.:

- (a) Where the infant has been abandoned, neglected or persistently ill-treated; or

(b) Where the person whose consent is to be dispensed with is unfit by reason of any physical or mental incapacity to have the care and control of the infant; or

(c) Where the consent ought, in the opinion of the court, to be dispensed with.

253. Article 21 (b) states that State parties shall recognize that intercountry adoption *may* be considered as an alternative means of childcare. Singapore's laws do not provide for intercountry adoption. An applicant and the child put up for adoption must be resident in Singapore at the time of application. This, however, does not preclude local adopters applying for a foreign-born child to enter Singapore for the purpose of adoption. The adoption of Singaporean babies by foreign parents is not an issue because of the large number of Singaporeans who wish to adopt and the relatively small number of Singaporean children available for adoption.

254. Local couples who have made their own arrangements to adopt foreign-born children are assisted by way of home study reports if this is required by the adoption agencies to facilitate the adoption. After ascertaining the adopters' eligibility and the residential status of the child, in-principle approval may be granted by the Immigration Department for the foreign-born child to enter Singapore. Subsequently, a dependant's pass is issued to the foreign-born child to enable the child to be considered a resident in Singapore for the purpose of adoption proceedings.

255. If there is sufficient evidence to show that the adoption is to circumvent the immigration restriction, e.g. adoption by relatives of children of work permit holders, Singapore will refuse the issue of the pass after careful consideration. Even if a child is adopted overseas, application for a dependant's pass for the child would be assessed afresh notwithstanding that the adoption order has been granted overseas.

256. For all adoptions under our laws, the court must be satisfied that the adopters have not received any financial consideration for the adoption order other than those sanctioned by the court, i.e. expenses (section 5 (c) of the Act).<sup>15</sup> This is to ensure that no transactions or sale of children has occurred.

### **G. Illicit transfer and non-return (art. 11)**

257. There is legislation in place to deal with the illicit transfer and non-return of children:

(a) Under the Penal Code, whoever conveys any person beyond the limits of Singapore without the consent of the person or person(s) legally authorized to consent on behalf of that person, is guilty of kidnapping that person from Singapore (sect. 360) and shall be punished with imprisonment for up to 10 years and shall also be liable to a fine or caning. Section 361 makes it an offence to take or entice a minor (under 14 years if male or under 16 years if female) out of the keeping of the lawful guardian, without the consent of the guardian. Under section 363, kidnapping from lawful guardianship carries the same penalty as kidnapping a person from Singapore. Under section 370, whoever exposes any person as a slave

shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to a fine. Whoever habitually exports slaves may be punished with life imprisonment. It is also an offence (under section 372 of the Penal Code) for someone to sell a person under the age of 21 years for prostitution;

(b) Under the Women's Charter, whoever trafficks in women or girls is guilty of an offence and shall be liable to imprisonment for up to five years and a fine (sect. 141 (1)). Under section 142, whoever by false pretences takes out of Singapore any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution is guilty of an offence and faces the same punishment as stated in section 141 (1);

(c) Under the Children and Young Persons Act, any person who takes part in transferring the possession, custody or control of a child for valuable consideration (e.g. money) faces imprisonment for up to four years.

#### **H. Abuse and neglect (art. 19), including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)**

258. Singapore takes a serious view of violence in any form. The Government and the community believe that no one deserves to be abused and protection will be accorded to those who are vulnerable. There are several pieces of legislation to deal with violence and the protection of children. The Children and Young Persons Act provides for the protection of and rights to protection for children and young persons who are 16 years of age and below. Part XI of the Women's Charter provides for the protection of women and girls against moral danger and exploitation. The Women's Charter also spells out responsibilities of parents in relation to the care of their children and protection of family members (including children) from family violence. In addition, the Penal Code provides for the imprisonment and/or the imposition of a fine on persons who abuse and neglect children.

259. In the administration of this legislation, the primary objective is to protect children and other vulnerable victims from abuse, ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment, sexual exploitation, taking part in public entertainment and illegal activities such as illegal hawking, gambling and begging. Though the number of reported cases of child abuse is not large and has in fact decreased by more than half over the past 10 years, Singapore is still concerned about and takes a serious view of child abuse.

#### **Legal provisions on cruelty to children**

260. Child abuse is defined as any act of omission or commission by a parent or guardian which would endanger or impair the child's physical or emotional well-being, or that is judged by a mixture of community values and professionals to be inappropriate. Child abuse can be broadly grouped under four categories:

(a) Physical abuse. Physical abuse occurs when a child is physically injured other than by accident. It includes injuries such as cuts, bruises, burns, bleeding and fractures caused by a range of acts including beating, shaking, inappropriate administration of alcohol and drugs, attempted suffocation or excessive discipline or physical punishment;

(b) Neglect. Neglect is a deliberate denial of a child's basic needs. This is where a parent, guardian or caregiver fails to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care and supervision or forces a child to undertake duties inappropriate to his physical strength or age to the extent of impairment to normal development;

(c) Sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child or young person for sexual gratification or any sexual activities between an adult and a child. It also includes exposing a child to forms of sexual acts or pornographic materials;

(d) Emotional and psychological abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse refers to the significant impairment of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and intellectual development and/or disturbances of the child's behaviour resulting from behaviours such as persistent hostility, ignoring, blaming, discriminating, or blatant rejection of the child.

261. The Women's Charter encapsulates the right of protection of any "family member" as defined under Section 64 of the Act. The definition includes an adopted child or stepchild. The Women's Charter defines "family violence" as the commission of the following acts:

(a) Wilfully or knowingly placing, or attempting to place, a family member in fear of hurt;

(b) Causing hurt to a family member by an act which is known or ought to have been known would result in hurt;

(c) Wrongfully confining or restraining a family member against his/her will; or

(d) Causing continual harassment with intent to cause or knowing that it is likely to cause anguish to a family member.

262. The court may, if satisfied on the balance of probabilities that family violence has been committed or is likely to be committed against a family member and that it is necessary for the protection of the family member, make a protection order restraining a person from using violence against the family member. An application for a protection order can be made by the victim concerned or, in the case of a child below 21 years of age or an incapacitated person, by a guardian or relative or person responsible for the care of the child or incapacitated person, or by any person appointed by the Minister. These provisions recognize the right of the child to be protected from all forms of family violence and enable the court to make protection orders for the protection of children.

263. The court may issue an expedited order (EO) even before the abuser is informed of a victim's application for a protection order. This is done when the court is satisfied that there is imminent danger of family violence being committed against the victim. Thus, a victim in imminent danger may be granted the protection even before the process of mediation and court hearing.

264. Section 4 of the Children and Young Persons Act states that if any person above the age of 18 who has custody, charge or care of any young person, wilfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons or exposes the child or young person to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned or exposed, in a manner likely to cause that child or young person unnecessary suffering or injury to his health (including injury to or loss of sight, hearing, a limb or organ of the body, and any mental derangement), that person shall be guilty of an offence. The penalty for such an offence is a prison term that can extend to four years, or a fine not exceeding S\$ 4,000, or both. In the event of death caused to a child or young person, the perpetrator may face a prison term which may extend to seven years, or a fine not exceeding S\$ 20,000, or both. Tougher penalties for such offences are provided for in the Penal Code should there be a need for them.

### **Management of abuse**

265. The MCDS is the lead agency for child protection and welfare. The MCDS works in close collaboration with the police, the Ministries of Education, Health and Manpower, the Attorney-General's Chambers, the Juvenile Court and NGOs in the protection of children and young persons. There are inter-agency working groups comprising representatives from relevant government agencies, the voluntary sector and concerned individuals which look at the management of family violence in Singapore, the protocols and the coordination of agencies involved in the management of family violence cases, and the implementation of nationwide campaigns and public education on family violence. There is also an Inter-Ministry Working Group on Child Abuse which oversees the coordination and management of child abuse among government agencies and the prevention of child abuse in Singapore.

266. MCDS, together with other relevant agencies, organize and promote public education and awareness programmes on child abuse and neglect and family violence. To ensure more effective management of child abuse, a manual on the management of child abuse cases in Singapore was developed in 1999. The manual contains the protocols of key agencies in the management of child abuse to ensure close collaboration and coordination among the different agencies and professionals. Another manual which deals with the management of family violence was also developed. Both manuals were launched on 20 September 1999 and distributed to relevant agencies. Workshops were also held for various professional groups on these manuals.

267. A multidisciplinary and multi-agency team, Child Abuse Protection Team (CAPT), was set up in 1996 under MCDS to effect a better team approach in the management of child abuse cases referred to MCDS for investigation. This team comprises professionals such as social workers, psychologists, doctors and psychiatrists. Related professionals relevant to the cases are invited to discussions as and when necessary. All reported cases of child abuse are investigated and abusers appropriately dealt with.

268. The Children and Young Persons Act allows the removal of a child from his parents if the child is assessed to be at risk and in need of protective custody. Care is taken to prevent family break-up as a consequence of the action while the abuser is dealt with under the law unless the child's well-being is threatened. Intervention efforts aim to help reconcile the abused child and his/her parents and family where possible.

269. The incidence of child abuse is closely monitored in Singapore. The number of child abuse cases reported to MCDS has decreased over the years from 279 in 1986 to 145 in 2000. Of the 145 cases for 2000, 50 (or 34 per cent) had evidence of abuse as determined by medical reports while 7 (or 5 per cent) were false complaints. Another 88 (or 61 per cent) had no evidence of abuse but were assessed to be in need of intervention and assistance.

**Table 7. Profile of alleged cases of child abuse known to MCDS (1998-2000)**

	cases		
	1998	1999	2000
No. of cases investigated	164	143	145
No. of cases with evidence of abuse	28	45	50
No. of cases with lack/no evidence of abuse but need assistance because of stress factor(s) in the family	100	80	88
No. of false complaints	36	18	7

**Table 8. Profile of child abuse cases known to MCDS (1998-2000)**

		cases		
Total No. of cases		1998	1999	2000
		28	45	50
Sex	Males	14	24	34
	Females	14	21	16
Race	Chinese	9	17	24
	Malay	10	20	21
	Indians	7	6	4
	Others	2	2	1
Age	0-2 years	3	7	8
	3-5 years	3	10	9
	6-11 years	13	22	24
	12 years and above	9	6	9

270. The Ministry of Health has in place a Child Abuse Committee which looks at standardization of protocols, reporting of cases and increasing awareness among health personnel including those in the private sector.

271. There are rules and regulations to ensure the safety of children in schools, kindergartens and childcare centres, especially concerning outdoor activities and injuries within and outside the school, kindergartens and childcare centres. Students and children who are seen or suspected by teachers to have been physically abused by their parents or guardians at home are reported

to MCDS and the police for further investigation. The MOE is informed of cases of abuse or potential abuse to facilitate monitoring of students and to help in the healing process of victims. To protect the privacy of the students affected, the matters are kept confidential by the school. The pupils are counselled by teachers and professional counsellors where necessary.

272. On 1 July 1996, MCDS, together with the police, the hospitals, NCSS and social service agencies, put in place an island-wide networking system for the management of family violence cases. The networking system is a collaboration between and among government and non-government agencies to better manage family violence cases and help victims and innocent family members of victims of family violence. The networking system also helps perpetrators deal with their violence and individuals and families to resolve their problems and differences in an amicable way. The Government has also developed training packages and introduced regular training programmes on family violence for social workers in non-government sectors to enhance the skills of such workers. MCDS funds training programmes<sup>16</sup> for social workers from the social service agencies involved in the networking system to enhance their skills and knowledge on family violence and the management of family problems.

273. The Family Court has also set up a Family Protection Unit (FPU) to manage family violence cases and to provide protection to victims of family violence for cases that come before the Court. Trained counsellors are available to provide counselling for child victims as well as perpetrators.

### **Physical and psychological recovery**

274. Victims of abuse are sent for psychological intervention by a psychologist or child psychiatrist where necessary. This is to help victims build up their self-esteem, empower victims and facilitate their reintegration into a normal life. The focus of therapy or counselling is to help victims to integrate and make sense of their experience in a way appropriate to their developmental stage. Therapy is also conducted to help victims discharge and express their views in a safe manner. This is to prevent victims from acting out in a negative way and thus placing themselves at further risk.

275. The psychological treatment for abused victims varies with the severity and duration of the abuse, the types of abuse and the age of the victim involved and his emotional make-up. The key concepts of the treatment therapy include:

- Providing a safe haven for the victim;
- Working through the traumatic reactions;
- Relief or reduction of anxiety;
- Encouraging the expression of anger and pain;



- Regaining personal power and sense of mastery;
- Correct faculty thinking through cognitive work; and
- Developing accomplished and evaluative goals for moving on in life.

276. Victims may be treated individually, in groups, or within the family if appropriate. Individual therapy focuses on the intra-psychic functioning. Family therapy deals more with non-abusive disciplinary and child-rearing techniques, parent-child relationship and parent-child communication and interaction pattern. Play therapy is administered for younger victims who cannot verbalize adequately.

### **Discipline**

277. School authorities are mindful that the school is first and foremost a place to nurture the child to develop his/her fullest potential. Hence, in the administration of discipline, great care is given to the enforcement measures so that the pupils' dignity and self-esteem are not eroded. In the disciplining of pupils, counselling towards responsibility is practised as an alternative to punishment. Schools are continually encouraged to implement proactive measures, such as the teaching of life-skills in order to instil values and self-discipline in their pupils.

278. Corporal punishment is meted out judiciously to errant male pupils, and even then as a last resort, by the principal or a teacher authorized by him/her. Under no circumstances are female pupils subjected to corporal punishment. The guidelines from the Ministry of Education (MOE) specify that corporal punishment should not be carried out in anger and should be done with a light cane on the palms or buttocks, and that other school personnel are not at all allowed to mete out corporal punishment. Parents are informed by the school of the corporal punishment meted out on the child and details of the offence. If they are of the view that the punishment has been excessive, they can report the matter to the MOE which will look into their complaints and take the appropriate action against errant school personnel.

279. In Singapore, caning may be used judiciously by parents as a mode of discipline. This form of punishment is used mainly to punish errant children for misdeeds and not meant to abuse the child. Parent education on best practices in disciplining and managing children is readily available.

280. The Singapore Government notes that though the family unit is relatively strong in Singapore, the family is increasingly under pressure in a fast-changing, highly globalized world. The Government works with civic groups, community leaders and voluntary groups to help families cope with child management issues.

### **Training**

281. Great emphasis is placed on skills and training of personnel involved in the management of child abuse cases. Ongoing training is carried out by the relevant agencies to enhance the competence of their respective staff. MCDS organizes inter-agency training programmes on child abuse and family violence regularly to enhance the state of collaboration. Regular training,

workshops and seminars are also conducted by MCDS, the police and MOH for their staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in the management of such cases. The police, in collaboration with the Society Against Family Violence (an NGO), conducts ongoing training for its front-line officers on family violence. MCDS and the police also coordinate small group workshops for police officers and social workers at divisional levels to enhance the collaboration between the NGOs and the police.

282. The Government fully funds some of the training programmes for social workers from the Government and voluntary sectors, e.g. MCDS funded a two-year diploma course on family and marital counselling for social workers from both the voluntary and government sectors. Training agencies are also commissioned by the Government to conduct regular training programmes for social workers working with victims and perpetrators. MCDS also sponsored four social workers from the voluntary sector to go on a study trip to study family violence management in Australia in 1997.

### **Publicity and awareness**

283. The Government recognizes that public education is important to deal with child abuse and neglect and family violence and works closely with the courts, Family Service Centres, crisis shelters, and organizations like the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations (SCWO, which is the umbrella body for women organizations), the Society Against Family Violence and the Singapore's Children's Society, to promote awareness of child abuse and family violence. Information booklets and pamphlets on family violence are developed and disseminated to hospitals, community centres, lawyers and others for their information and reference should they come into contact with such cases. MCDS conducts talks in schools and pre-school facilities such as childcare centres on the signs and symptoms of child abuse and the protocol for the referral and management of cases. Child abuse pamphlets and booklets aimed at raising awareness were developed and disseminated in 1999 and 2001. More public education efforts will be mounted to raise awareness, enhance the protective network for victims and reach out to perpetrators.

### **Preventive measures**

284. Singapore implemented the Parent Education Programme in June 1985 as a preventive and developmental programme to support parents in the demanding task of parenting. The programme helps to equip parents with the essential knowledge and skills in parenting to enhance their effectiveness in the management of their children and prevent abuse. In 1987, the programme was expanded and renamed Family Life Education (FLE) programme. The FLE programme promotes positive attitudes towards marriage, parenthood and children. This is to help couples getting married to be better prepared for what lies ahead of them as a newly-wed couple, as parents and as grandparents.

285. FLE (including the parent education programme) is organized through Family Service Centres, the mass media, schools and workplaces. A series of pamphlets focusing on marriage, parenting and disciplining children has been produced by MCDS for distribution to the public and for the use of organizations conducting such programmes. It is hoped that these steps would go a long way in strengthening families and playing a part in child protection and child welfare.

### **I. Periodic review of placement (art. 25)**

286. The cases of children placed in children's homes, foster care or institutions are reviewed periodically by Case Review Committees in each institution. An Advisory Board and Discharge Committee review all cases admitted into institutions either by the Juvenile Court or the Director of Social Welfare for offences or for being beyond parental control. The Advisory Board and Discharge Committee comprises individuals from various fields and is appointed by the Minister for Community Development and Sports to advise and make recommendations to the Director of Social Welfare on cases in institutions administered by MCDS.

287. For those who are admitted into hospitals for treatment of mental disorders, the Mental Disorders Treatment Act provides for periodic review of the treatment given and the review of patients. Protocols and guidelines are in place to ensure periodic review of treatment.

### **VII. BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE**

288. Singapore children enjoy quality, up-to-date health care that is readily accessible and affordable. The Ministry of Health (MOH) provides preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services and coordinates the planning and development of the public and private health sectors.

289. National efforts towards health promotion and disease prevention are sustained and supported by all sectors. The national health-care expenditure in 1999 was S\$ 4.3 billion (US\$ 2.65 billion) or 3 per cent of the gross domestic product. National health expenditure was S\$ 1,347 (US\$ 831) per capita in 1999. Government subsidy on the public health-care services was S\$ 1,089 million (US\$ 672).

#### **A. Right to life and development (art. 6, para. 2)**

##### **Child mortality rates**

290. Child mortality rates have declined greatly since the 1940s. The initial fall can be attributed to improvement in socio-economic conditions, a comprehensive maternal and child health and family planning programme, and the setting up of a postgraduate programme at the National University of Singapore in the 1970s which trains paediatric, neonatal and obstetric and gynaecology specialists. Improved standards of health care in these areas have contributed to the improvement in health indices. Neonatal, perinatal and infant mortality rates improved from 8.9 per 1,000 live births, 13.4 per 1,000 live and stillbirths and 11.7 per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 2.4 per 1,000 live births, 4.9 per 1,000 live and stillbirths and 4.1 per 1,000 live births in 1998 respectively.

291. In addition to the factors in the above paragraph, the following factors have also contributed to the improved rates, which helped to rank Singapore as one of the best in the world in health care for children:

(a) Immunization and environmental health programmes which controlled infectious diseases;

- (b) Introduction of neonatal intensive care units at all major hospitals with obstetric practice;
- (c) Improved care of neonates and advances in managing premature babies;
- (d) Good obstetric practice and quality antenatal care (more than 99 per cent of births attended by trained personnel);
- (e) Provision of prenatal and post-natal care provided at primary health clinics and hospitals and special precautions taken for high-risk pregnancies, in particular near term and at the time of labour;
- (f) Mass screening (thyroid function and G6PD deficiency) for newborns;
- (g) Availability of cardiac surgery; and
- (h) Renal dialysis/renal and liver transplants for children with chronic renal/liver failure.

292. Further improvements in mortality rates would be directed at the control of congenital anomalies, continued improvement in perinatal and neonatal care, control of accidents, prevention of suicides and improvement in treatment of cancer and continued improvement in treatment of infections like pneumonia (see tables 9-11).

**Table 9. Reported diphtheria, poliomyelitis, measles, acute hepatitis B, neonatal tetanus, pertussis, congenital rubella and childhood tuberculosis meningitis in Singapore (1982-1998)**

Year	Diphtheria	Poliomyelitis	Measles	Acute hepatitis B*	Neonatal tetanus	Pertussis	Congenital rubella	Childhood tuberculosis meningitis
1982	6 (2)	1 (1)	1 965	182	1	7	3	4
1983	4 (4)	2 (2)	677	217	3	7	10	1
1984	0	2 (2)	2 417	235	1	1	7	0
1985	0	0	136	243	0	0	3	1
1986	1	2 (2)	218	229	3	9	3	1
1987	1 (1)	0	123	182	0	9	2	1
1988	0	0	192	226	0	11	0	0
1989	1 (1)	0	146	244	0	1	2	0
1990	1	1 (1)	143	206	0	8	4	0
1991	1 (1)	0	216	156	0	5	1	0
1992	1	0	606	108	0	14	4	0
1993	0	0	665	96	0	1	4	0
1994	0	0	159	79	1	2	2	0
1995	0	0	185	112	0	1	2	2
1996	1 (1)	0	308	126	0	4 (1)	2	2
1997	0	0	1 413	0	0	2	0	2
1998	0	0	114	1	1	1	0	0

( ) Imported cases.

\* Indigenous cases.

**Table 10. Childhood immunization (1995-1998)**

	1995	1996	1997	1998
% of infants immunized against tuberculosis	97	97	98	98
% of infants immunized against diphtheria/tetanus/whooping cough	92	92	93	96
% of infants immunized against poliomyelitis	92	91	94	96
Hepatitis B	94	89	94	96
% of children aged 2 years immunized against measles	90	94	90	94
% of children aged 12 years immunized against German measles	90	92	84	95

**Table 11. Live births and infant mortality rates for countries with populations greater than 2.5 million and infant mortality rates equal to or less than the United States (1992, 1993, 1994\*)**

Country	Number of births in 1993 or 1994 <sup>+</sup>	Infant mortality rate**			Birth rates**	
		1994	1993	1992	1994	1993
Japan	1 258 237	4.2	4.4	4.5	10.1	9.6
Singapore	49 602	4.3	4.7	4.9	-	17.5
Finland	65 032	4.7	4.4	5.2	12.9	12.8
Sweden	110 828	4.4	4.8	5.2	12.6	-
Hong Kong	70 451	-	4.8	4.8	-	11.9
Norway	59 041	5.2	5.0	5.9	13.7	13.7
Germany	805 760	-	-	6.2	9.4	9.8
Denmark	67 442	-	5.6	6.5	13.4	13.0
Ireland	49 456	5.9	6.0	6.6	-	13.9
Switzerland	82 900	5.5	6.2	6.4	11.9	12.1
Netherlands	189 600	5.9	6.3	6.3	12.1	-
Australia	260 229	-	6.1	6.9	-	14.7
Austria	91 588	6.1	6.5	7.5	11.1	11.8
France	721 000	6.1	-	-	-	12.3
Canada	384 200	6.2	-	6.1	13.1	-
United Kingdom	781 017	6.2	6.3	6.6	-	-
New Zealand	58 867	-	7.2	7.3	-	17.1
Italy	433 615	6.7	7.4	8.2	9.3	9.4
Spain	388 708	7.2	7.6	7.2	-	9.9
Belgium	116 449	7.6	8.0	8.9	11.6	12.1
United States	3 952 767	8.0	8.3	8.5	15.2	15.5
Greece	102 500	8.3	8.5	8.6	9.8	9.9

\* Data available as of September 1996. Data available from United Nations Statistical Office or from United Nations Demographic Yearbook, 1992, 1993, or 1994, Population Reference Bureau, 1996 (1994 figures for Sweden, Finland, Norway, Ireland, United Kingdom, France and Greece), or health, United States, 1995.

\*\* Rate per 1,000 live births.

+ With the exception of Germany, the number of births is reported for the latest year for which data on infant mortality rates were available. The number of births for Germany is reported for 1993.

& Rate per 1,000 total population.

Ref. *Paediatrics*, vol. 98, No. 6, December 1996.

### Causes of death among children in Singapore

293. The most common causes of death among children under 5 years of age are congenital anomalies, perinatal complications, complications of prematures, pneumonia, heart diseases, cancer and accidental falls. In 1997, the mortality rate of children < 5 years old in Singapore was 3.8/1,000 which, together with Sweden's, is the lowest in the world.

294. The most common causes of death among children 5-18 years are accidental injuries, cancer, infections, congenital anomalies, suicides and heart diseases (see tables 12-13 on causes of mortality in children).

**Table 12. Major causes of mortality in children < 5 years**

Causes	cases		
	1996	1997	1998
Congenital anomalies	99	86	89
Perinatal complications	64	61	62
Pneumonia	23	35	41
Heart diseases	13	5	5
Cancer	13	19	13
Leukaemia	6	6	5
Other malignant neoplasm	7	13	8
Accidental falls	6	6	8

**Table 13. Major causes of mortality in children aged 5-18 years**

Causes	cases		
	1996	1997	1998
Accidental injuries	35	31	28
Road traffic accidents	17	17	14
Others	18	14	14
Cancer	32	35	32
Leukaemia	11	15	11
Other neoplasm	21	20	21
Infections	15	14	16
Pneumonia	6	10	12
Others	9	4	4
Congenital anomalies	13	9	7
Suicides	9	10	18
Heart diseases	5	7	11

*Cancer*

295. The most common cancer in childhood is acute leukaemia followed by brain tumours and solid tumours. Most childhood cancers can now be “cured” with multi-modal and new multi-drug protocols. Bone marrow transplant is available to those who need it. These modalities are offered at KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital and National University Hospital. The medical costs are subsidized and may even be free for the needy.

296. The Singapore Cancer Registry maintained by the Department of Community, Occupation and Family Medicine (National University of Singapore) carries out cancer surveillance. A one-stop Cancer Centre has been set up in Singapore. It coordinates all cancer control activities, acts as a tertiary referral centre for the management of cancer patients and provides facilities for teaching, training and research.

297. The Hospice Care Association provides outpatient and home hospice care for children. The MOH also provides a subvention for home care programmes.

*Injuries and injury prevention*

298. Injuries are the leading cause of death among school-going and economically active age groups while home injuries are the most common cause of hospitalization in children. Several organizations are involved in helping to reduce the incidence of such injuries, e.g. the Home Safety Committee of the National Safety Council is involved in education of the public; the Singapore Civil Defence Force teaches safety drills; and the Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE) is in charge of the safety of electrical appliances and children’s toys.

*Suicides*

299. Suicide during childhood and early adolescence is relatively uncommon, although the rate has been rising. Risk factors for teenage suicide are being female, Indian, from a lower social-economic class, and having problems with family, school and relationships. There has been a documented peak during the September-October period corresponding with the school final term examinations.

**Table 14. Suicide rates in Singapore (per 100,000) - 10-19 years**

Year	10-14 years	15-19 years
1981-1985	0.5	5.4
1986-1990	1.2	7.1
1991-1995	1.3	6.1

Source: Registry of Births and Deaths.

300. Though our suicide rate is lower than that in other developed countries (see table 15), there continues to be a concerted effort by both government and private agencies to prevent suicides among children and young persons.

**Table 15. Suicide rates - 15-19 years (1991)**

Country	Rate per 100,000
New Zealand	15.7
Finland	15.0
Canada	13.5
Norway	13.4
United States of America	11.1
Australia	10.5
Singapore	6.9

Source: UNICEF Report 1992.

301. The Child Guidance Clinic of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) provides outpatient and inpatient services for emotionally disturbed children, including those with suicidal tendencies. The Child Guidance Clinic runs a 24-hour “Crisis Help-line” for their patients, police, hospitals and public and private “homes”, to provide help and guidance at that “critical time” of need. Other measures undertaken to reduce stress and suicide among children include:

- (a) Setting up several help-lines such as:
  - (i) Samaritans of Singapore which provides round-the-clock advice on any crisis or emergency;
  - (ii) Parent-line for parents who have problems dealing with their children; and
  - (iii) Teens-line for teenagers to share their problems, hopes and dreams;

(b) Organization of “stress management programmes” by Singapore’s School Health Service (SHS) where lectures such as “Coping with stress”, “Teenage sexuality”, “Problem-solving skills”, “Problems adolescents encounter”, “Weight management”, “Enhancing self-esteem” and “Common behaviour problems” are given regularly to schoolchildren to help them cope better;

(c) Parents are advised, through formal public lectures and also face-to-face encounters by Family Health Service (FHS), the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), the School Health Service and private agencies, not to put their children under excessive stress and not to have unrealistic expectations for their children. These lectures aim to inform parents of proper parenting skills, and to increase public awareness of the avenues for help in times of need;

(d) Public education materials for parents on how to help their children cope better and other books by local and international writers on such subjects as parent-child relationships are readily available in bookshops and public libraries.



302. We work with the Singapore media to persuade them not to sensationalize suicides and to educate the public about suicides. Professional groups like teachers, health workers, and social workers are educated on “warning signs” of suicides such as depression and change of emotional behaviour, so that they can recognize the problem early and refer children for preventive therapy.

### **B. Disabled children (art. 23)**

303. Policy matters on disability in Singapore are coordinated by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) with the involvement of NCSS. The Ministry looks at the overall policy on rehabilitation and coordinates the action of government departments and non-governmental organizations. Ministries and agencies deal with services for which they have policy and specific responsibilities.

304. In the development and implementation of programmes for people with disabilities, the Government adopts the following philosophy and approach:

- (a) People with disabilities should:
  - (i) Have opportunities to achieve their potential and be independent where possible;
  - (ii) Be integrated in society where feasible and practical;
  - (iii) Be encouraged to live within the community as far as possible; and
  - (iv) Be institutionalized only as a last resort;

(b) The care and welfare of people with disabilities is everyone’s concern i.e. the family, the community and the Government.

305. Singapore is signatory to the Asian and Pacific Decade for Disabled Persons 1993-2002 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) which aims to promote the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream society and also promote equal opportunities and participation.

### **National Birth Defect Registry (NBDR)**

306. NBDR was set up by MOH in January 1993 to monitor birth defects, the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the perinatal period and early childhood in Singapore. Birth defects had a high death toll among the young and were responsible for more than a third (34.5 per cent) of deaths in the 0-9 age group in 1966. In the year 2000, congenital abnormalities were responsible for about 29 per cent of deaths in the 0-9 age group.

307. NBDR captures information on all children with major birth defects who were born from January 1983. It provides important inputs for drawing up intervention programmes to reduce birth defects and makes possible the evaluation of such control programmes. The sources of notification of NBDR are:

- (a) Antenatal notifications (for the diagnosis of defects before delivery):
  - (i) Cytogenetic laboratories, which carry out antenatal diagnostic tests for birth defects;
  - (ii) Abortion clinics where abortions are carried out for foetuses with birth defects; and
  - (iii) Department of Pathology, Singapore General Hospital, for post-mortems done on stillbirths;
- (b) Postnatal notifications (for diagnosis of defects after delivery):
  - (i) Neonatal units, which report birth defects in newborns (this is the most important source of notification to the NBDR); and
  - (ii) Paediatricians/paediatric surgeons and Paediatric Departments which report birth defects during childhood. This accounts for nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of the total notifications.

308. Various specialists in related disciplines follow up on these children in hospitals where they receive the necessary curative and initial rehabilitative care. Many conditions have “Combined Therapy Clinics” (e.g. Spina Bifida Clinic) consisting of specialists of various relevant disciplines who can jointly decide on the best mode of treatment and rehabilitation of these children. These children are often also referred to various private/voluntary or government-related bodies best suited for their needs, e.g. cerebral palsied children are referred to the “Spastic Children’s Association of Singapore”. These agencies are mainly responsible for their rehabilitation, education and job placement.

## **Education**

309. Education in Singapore is available to children with disability. Those who are able to withstand the rigours of mainstream education attend mainstream primary and secondary schools, junior colleges or centralized institutes. Those who cannot, receive their education in special education (SPED) schools run by voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) which receive financial support from both the Ministry of Education and NCSS. In addition, the Government also provides professional and infrastructural support to SPED schools. While there is access to education for disabled children, education is not compulsory for these children.

310. School fees are set by individual VWOs. No child with disability is deprived of special education on account of inability to pay. All VWOs have subsidy schemes to help needy pupils pay their school fees. The subsidy schemes are also extended for the payment of transport and the provision of free meals. In 1998, there were 16 SPED schools run by VWOs under the umbrella of NCSS. They provide education to more than 3,500 disabled children of various categories of disabilities (table 16).

**Table 16. Schools for different disability groups**

Type of disability	Number of schools	Enrolment
Educationally subnormal	4	905
Intellectually disabled	5	1 355
Hearing impaired	2	272
Visually handicapped	1	61
Cerebral palsied	1	204
Multiple handicapped	3	741
Total	16	3 538

311. SPED schools provide specially customized educational programmes and training for the different disability groups they serve. The programmes aim to develop the pupils to their fullest potential and help them to grow up with confidence to become independent, self-supporting and contributing members of society where possible. Besides receiving classroom instruction from the teachers, the pupils also receive help and training from paramedical professionals such as psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists and social workers.

312. Disabled children begin to attend SPED schools usually from the age of 4 to 6 years. Some SPED schools provide early intervention programmes for younger disabled children from as early as six months. The school-leaving age varies from 14 to 18 years.

313. The sensory impaired pupils who are able to pass the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) continue their education in mainstream secondary schools under an Integration Programme. As at January 1999, there were 114 hearing impaired and 19 visually impaired pupils in the Integration Programme. These pupils attend regular classes in and follow the curriculum of mainstream schools. The pupils in the Integration Programme enjoy the same benefits in education as their non-disabled peers. In addition, they also receive instructional materials and specialized equipment fully paid for by MOE. Special resource teachers are deployed to the schools to assist them. The resource teachers for the hearing impaired pupils work with them during instructional time within their classes, translating lessons into sign language. The resource teachers for the visually impaired pupils teach Braille, transcribe pupils' assignments and examinations and sources for reading materials. Also, resource teachers provide tutorials, guidance and counselling for the pupils.

314. The other pupils, upon graduation from the SPED schools, continue to receive education and training in various training centres and workshops run by the respective VWOs with government support. Those who are able are ultimately placed in open employment and those who require more supervision will attend production sheltered workshops or work activity centres.

### **Transportation**

315. People with disabilities have different degrees of mobility. Most can and do take public transport such as buses and the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) daily. Steps have been taken by public transport operators in recent years to make their systems user-friendlier and more

accessible to people with disabilities. To help them, Singapore's Land Transport Authority (LTA) and public transport operators have introduced various measures to facilitate their travel on public transport. These include:

- (a) Reserved seats for the disabled on buses and MRT trains;
- (b) Low-floor buses to facilitate boarding;
- (c) Ramps at MRT stations;
- (d) Voice announcements at MRT stations upon arrival to help the visually impaired;
- (e) Non-slip floor surfaces to demarcate the edge of platforms in elevated MRT stations; and
- (f) Retrofitted vertical lifts at MRT stations for the Woodlands extension line as well as future North-East and Changi extension lines.

316. Several other schemes have also been established to assist the disabled and VWOs in their transportation needs:

- (a) Waiver of Additional Registration Fee (ARF)<sup>17</sup> and Certificate of Entitlement (COE)<sup>18</sup> Scheme by the Government to help lower the costs of purchasing vehicles by NGOs; and
- (b) Taxi and Bus Subsidy Scheme to help working persons and students with disabilities to commute to work and special schools at subsidized rates.

317. LTA adopts stringent eligibility criterion for applications for vocational licences for public vehicles, and enforces a strict disciplinary system on holders of existing licences. This is to ensure that drivers of public service vehicles like buses and taxis are reliable and credible, and our public transport service is safe for use, even for a child alone. The drivers are closely monitored for any offences committed. The penalty for a severe offence which threatens the safety of commuters may mean a life-time ban on driving a public service vehicle.

### **Efforts in integrating the disabled in public housing**

318. Singapore regards the development of a barrier-free physical environment as necessary for integrating the disabled into community life. In 1990, the Code on Barrier-Free Accessibility in Buildings was introduced to help consultation with those who are affected and was well received by those with disabilities. Existing buildings are required to undergo extensive retrofitting to provide basic accessibility features when they upgrade. Where technically possible, these are incorporated in the older estates that are being upgraded.

319. To create a barrier-free physical environment, the following accessibility features have been incorporated in all public housing projects since 1990:

(a) Ramps to facilitate barrier-free access from the housing blocks to the driveway and parking lots;

(b) Designated parking lots for the disabled in Housing Development Board (HDB) multi-storey and open space parking lots. These designated parking lots are usually located near lifts or ramps to enhance accessibility for the disabled. Provision has also been made to allow for the construction of additional parking lots for the disabled should the current provision be insufficient;

(c) Lifts with landings on every floor, wide entrances for the passage of a wheelchair, lowered lift button panel (between 1.2 m and 1.5 m from the ground), Braille plates on the lift button panel and voice synthesizers to help those who are visually handicapped. Grip rails are also provided on all three panels of the lift to provide support for the aged and disabled.

320. Access to the sensory dimension was also provided for the hearing impaired. A major proportion of English and Chinese language programmes are subtitled in English, Mandarin or Malay to reach out to the hearing impaired. As far as possible, a selection of genres such as movies, dramas, docu-dramas and sitcoms are subtitled for variety. Current and up-to-date teletext news is also available.

321. Some Singaporeans with disabilities have secured employment and done well in their careers. Those with limitations are assisted by VWOs which continue to work with their residual abilities.

322. ESCAP has sought the participation of Singapore in its efforts to encourage others to learn from Singapore's experience in the provision of services for the disabled. Singapore has a wide range of services and much has been done to meet the varying needs of the disabled. Singapore will continue to increase the amenities, services and programmes for the disabled further over time.

### **C. Health and health services (art. 24)**

323. The two main government departments responsible for preventive child health care are Family Health Service (FHS) and School Health Service (SHS). FHS caters only to pre-school children and provides immunization and child health surveillance. The budget allocated for the services for the past two years is given in the tables below.

**Table 17. FHS budget allocation for children**

	1996	1997	1998
Total	S\$ 4 400 000 (US\$ 2 716 050)	S\$ 5 600 000 (US\$ 3 456 790)	S\$ 6 100 000 (US\$ 3 765 430)

**Table 18. SHS budget allocation for schoolchildren**

	1996	1997	1998
Total	S\$ 9 406 520 (US\$ 5 806 490)	S\$ 10 397 550 (US\$ 6 418 240)	S\$ 11 000 000 (US\$ 6 790 120)

Conversion rate used: S\$ 1.62 = US\$ 1 (Figures are rounded up).

324. The annual budget allocated to FHS and SHS is used to provide preventive health care to all children up to junior college level (i.e. usually children up to 18 years). This budget does not include expenditure on curative care provided for sick children. Aside from the health-care services provided by the Government, a sick child may also seek medical treatment from various medical institutions such as private general practitioners, hospitals and medical centres.

### **Access to health care**

325. Primary, secondary, and even tertiary health-care are easily accessible. Government polyclinics and private practitioners are located all over the island and usually concentrated in new towns where the population density is high.

326. The financial policy of the health-care delivery system is based on individual responsibility coupled with government subsidies to keep basic health care affordable. FHS and SHS charge a nominal sum for attendance at their clinics. Children pay half the charges of an adult, i.e. S\$ 4 per visit and S\$ 0.60 per item of medicine per week (ceiling of S\$ 3.00). Immunization (except hepatitis B) is free in FHS and SHS.

327. Those admitted to hospitals can pay their bills through Medisave, a national compulsory savings scheme to help individuals save for their hospitalization expenses for themselves and their families. If they demand a higher level of service, there are various government and private insurance schemes to help pay for the higher expenses.

328. Financial assistance is available for needy children in government hospitals and clinics. The Government has set up a Medical Endowment Fund (Medifund) to assist needy Singaporeans pay for medical care. Medifund serves as a safety net to Singaporeans who, despite help from government subsidies, are still unable to settle their hospital bills. In 1998, there were 69,000 applications for Medifund assistance and 99 per cent were approved. A total of S\$ 14.52 million (US\$ 8.96 million) was disbursed in financial year 1998 (1 April 1998-31 March 1999).

### **Health-care network**

329. Preventive health care comprises health education, immunization against infectious diseases and selective health screening. Curative and rehabilitative services are provided through the government and restructured hospitals and a network of government polyclinics for general outpatient care. The public health-care delivery system is complemented by a system of health care provided by private medical practitioners. MOH also regulates the standard and practice of health-care services.

330. MOH works closely with the Ministry of the Environment (ENV) in the maintenance of environmental health and control of communicable diseases and Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to improve the industrial and occupational health of workers. It also liaises with health authorities and medical organizations worldwide. Views are exchanged and experiences shared through bilateral events throughout the year. Participation in international meetings and international recognition by WHO of local health departments (which are designated as WHO Collaborating Centres to carry out field studies and serve as reference and training centres for the region) have helped to boost Singapore's efforts to become a regional centre of medical excellence.

### **Primary and family health services**

331. Private practitioners and government polyclinics, outpatient dispensaries and childcare clinics provide primary health care in Singapore. In 1998, there were 2,489 doctors in the private sector providing 80 per cent of primary health care. The Ministry's Family Health Service provides the remaining 20 per cent.

332. There are 14 polyclinics, 4 outpatient dispensaries and 2 maternal and child health clinics under the FHS. The polyclinics are family practice clinics that provide comprehensive continuing care to the patient and family members. Services include medical management of acute and chronic illness, follow-up of patients discharged from hospital, maternal and child health care, health screening, health education, patient counselling, diagnostic services (lab and X-ray), dental care, rehabilitative services and immunization.

333. Maternal and child health-care services include antenatal and postnatal care, family planning information, health education and immunization and health surveillance for pre-school (0-6 years). Children are monitored on their growth and development using Denver Developmental Screening Tests to detect abnormalities in growth or development delays.

### **School Health Service (SHS)**

334. SHS provides health surveillance, immunization and health education through its school and clinic (Student Health Centre) programmes. The main objectives are early detection and management of health problems, follow-up of students with risk factors for major diseases, disease prevention through immunization, and health promotion through encouragement of healthy lifestyle and habits.

335. In 1998, SHS conducted a total of 612,776 screening examinations. Full medical examinations are provided for students in primary 1 and 6 and their equivalents in special and vocational schools. More specialized types of screening examination are also carried out, e.g. vision, auditory, spinal, etc. Follow-up of defective health problems was provided for 511,174 students in 1998.

336. Students identified with health problems are referred to relevant agencies for further evaluation and management. Of the 157,553 students referred in 1998, less than 1 per cent were referred to the hospitals. The rest were seen at the Student Health Centre clinics by the SHS doctors or the seven specialist clinics, which include adolescent, cardiac, endocrine, learning disorders, otology, ophthalmology and spinal clinics. A total of 327,123 doses of vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, rubella and tuberculosis were administered to schoolchildren in 1998.

337. Health education activities reached out to a total of 368,949 students and 576,928 parents in 1997. These activities included 21,170 talks, 1,157 video presentations, 20 health fairs and distribution of pamphlets (802,181 pieces). In 1998, the target population reached was 252,527 and the number of activities numbered 13,979.

338. SHS also monitors environmental cleanliness, ambience, safety and compliance of the school canteens to vision care guidelines (lighting, etc.) and quality of food content.

### **Dental clinics**

339. Preventive, promotional and curative dental health services are provided through the School Dental Service, the Hospital Dental Service and the Community Dental Service. They are freely and easily accessible via the hospital dental clinics, community dental clinics, school dental clinics and multiple private dental clinics located all over the country. Dental treatment in school dental clinics is given free of charge. School Dental Services allocation for schoolchildren was about S\$ 17.3 million (about US\$ 10,679,000) for 1997 and S\$ 18 million (about US\$ 11,111,100) for 1998.

340. The School Dental Service (SDS) provides dental care at 196 primary schools, 89 secondary schools and 14 special schools for the handicapped. This is done through 187 school dental clinics, 6 mobile dental clinics and the School Dental Centre at the Institute of Dental Health. Treatment is provided by dentists, dental nurses and dental therapists. In 1998, 95 per cent of primary school pupils, 53 per cent of secondary school pupils and 46 per cent of special school pupils received dental care whilst the rest sought dental attention when necessary.

341. Community dental clinics consist of a number of dental clinics opened in polyclinics to bring dental services closer to residents. The first such clinic was opened in August 1996. To date, there are 10 such clinics.

342. Singapore's potable water has been fluoridated since 1957. This programme has helped to lower the decayed, missing and filled teeth (DMFT) index of 12-year-olds to 1.0 since 1994.



## Pharmaceutical Department

343. The Pharmaceutical Department of the Ministry of Health is responsible for ensuring the quality, safety and efficiency of pharmaceutical products sold in the market. To achieve this, the following drug regulatory programmes are implemented: drug registration; quality surveillance of pharmaceutical products; adverse drug reaction monitoring.

344. Singapore's population has ready access to good quality pharmaceutical products through both the public and private health-care sectors. MOH employs a Standard Drug List similar to the WHO Essential Drug List, which constitutes all essential drugs required to treat the common ailments of the majority of patients, and this is consistently reviewed to ensure that it remains comprehensive.

## Hospital services

345. There are 12 public sector hospitals (3 government and 9 government restructured) and 13 private hospitals which provide curative and rehabilitative care to the population. Of the 12 public sector hospitals, 6 provide acute general inpatient and specialist outpatient services and 24-hour accident and emergency services. The other 6 hospitals serve special functions, e.g. KK Women's and Children's Hospital provides specialized health care for women and children.

346. Restructured hospitals follow the Ministry's policy, direction and guidelines. The Government provides a subvention to enable them to continue providing subsidized medical services at affordable rates. Public sector hospitals provide 80 per cent of hospital beds while the private sector accounts for nearly 20 per cent.

## Quality assurance

347. All hospitals (government and restructured) and all government clinics in FHS and SHS have quality assurance programmes to assess the quality of service of their health care, personnel and service. They strive to maintain the highest attainable standard of health care and facilities for the treatment of illness, and preventive and rehabilitative health care.

348. As at December 1998, there were about 111 paediatric specialists and about 184 trained obstetric and gynaecological specialists. Tables 19 and 20 show the health manpower.

**Table 19. National health manpower ratio**

	1996	1997	1998
Doctors	1:770	1:760	1:750
Dentists	1:4 330	1:4 260	1:4 230
Pharmacists	1:4 210	1:3 958	1:3 873
Nurses	1:264	1:254	1:248

**Table 20. Health personnel, 1980, 1990, 1996-1999**

Health personnel	1980	1990	1996	1997	1998	1999
Doctors	1 976	3 573	4 661	4 912	5 148	5 325
Public	855	1 831	2 177	2 312	2 416	2 535
Private	1 052	1 593	2 302	2 380	2 489	2 606
Not in active practice	69	149	182	220	243	184
Dentists	346	672	835	878	914	942
Public	161	185	176	187	180	167
Private	177	466	626	666	696	727
Not in active practice	8	21	33	25	38	48
Pharmacists	368	587	858	944	998	1 043
Public	58	96	175	177	204	219
Private	310	452	518	593	610	598
Not in active practice	NA	39	165	174	184	226
Nurses and midwives	8 324	10 238	13 680	14 705	15 568	15 947
Public	5 357	6 150	7 679	8 277	8 681	8 692
Private	1 801	2 610	3 719	3 880	3 827	3 872
Not in active practice	1 166	1 478	2 282	2 548	3 060	3 383

### Nutritional status of children

349. The nutritional status of Singapore children is closely monitored from birth up to the time they leave school. During the neonatal period, breastfeeding is strongly advised and measures are taken to prevent distribution of milk samples to newborns in hospitals and government clinics. Education materials on “why breastfeed, how to prepare for breastfeeding and how to breastfeed” are distributed to health-care workers. The Breastfeeding Mothers’ Support Group (BMSG) runs a telephone hotline and its members are on hand to help mothers with any matter related to breastfeeding. The government polyclinics hold nutrition talks and demonstrations on infant feeding and weaning diets and on diets for babies and toddlers. Dietician counselling services are available in 12 polyclinics. Children who fail to thrive are followed up or referred to hospital for investigations.

350. The Department of Nutrition (DON) is responsible for improving the nutritional status of Singaporeans and reducing the incidence of diet-related diseases. DON constantly reviews current knowledge about diet and diseases to formulate various national nutritional policies and dietary guidelines for health promotion and disease treatment. Public education is carried out through the mass media as well as face-to-face activities. DON promotes a healthy food supply through collaboration with other ministries, non-governmental bodies, the media and the food industry. Guidelines and training courses have been developed to promote healthier menu choices and catering practices in school canteens, childcare centres, kindergartens, hospitals, public eating places and residential institutions for children and young persons, besides institutions and facilities for other groups.

351. Consultation is provided on a regular basis to various bodies on matters like nutritional claims in food advertising. Nutrition is also incorporated into educational curricula at all levels. Assistance and collaboration are rendered to both local and international research projects. The nutritional status of Singaporeans is monitored through dietary surveys and food consumption studies.

352. There is also close nutritional monitoring of schoolchildren by SHS. In 1998, 3.3 per cent of schoolchildren were found to be underweight (weight for height <80 per cent of population mean based on local standards). These were referred to the Student Health Centre for management and follow-up. There was no case of gross malnutrition detected. The last reported case of death of a child from protein-calorie malnutrition was in 1988 (a male <1 year old). Since then, there have been no deaths from malnutrition in children (<18 years) reported in Singapore. Although 6.4 per cent of our schoolchildren were found to be underweight in 1996, most of these cases were due to food fads and excessive physical activity and no cases of gross malnutrition were found. The number of underweight school children has fallen to 3.3 per cent in 1998.

353. Singapore's greater nutritional problem is obesity. In 1998, 10.9 per cent of schoolchildren were found to be obese (weight for height >120 per cent of population mean). Such children are closely monitored, given advice on diet and exercise programmes and informed of risk of cardiovascular problems in adult life.

354. The prevalence of underweight and obesity between males and females among schoolchildren are comparable (see table 21 on common health problems in the School Health Service), except those in secondary 4 (aged 15-16) where boys have a higher prevalence of being underweight than girls. This is probably due to the higher level of physical activity. There is no discrimination against female children in Singapore. Although "malnutrition" due to food deprivation and defined by underweight is not a great problem in Singapore, we plan to look at the "underweights" for the under-7 age group for more comprehensive data on the status of nutrition of our children and for comparison with other countries.

### **Circumcision**

355. Male circumcision is carried out for medical and religious reasons and involves the removal of the foreskin of the penis by surgical means. It is usually done in a sterile environment, and in private by either a trained doctor or male nurse. Female circumcision is usually done in infancy. The procedure involves the removal of a small piece of skin from the clitoris by doctors, with sterile scissors or scalpel in a sterile environment, and in private. The rest of the genitalia are left intact. Antibiotic cream is then applied to the cut. So far, no cases of complications from female circumcision have been reported in Singapore government polyclinics and hospitals. As there is no mandatory reporting of circumcision cases to the Ministry of Health, the actual prevalence of such practices is not known, but anecdotal evidence suggests that while male circumcision is common practice among Muslims and Jews in Singapore, female circumcision is rare, if practised at all.

### Frequent illness and health problems

356. The major causes of hospitalization in children in Singapore are injuries, asthma, infections like gastroenteritis and pneumonia, malignancy and convulsions. Table 21 shows the prevalence of conditions present in schoolchildren seen by the School Health Service. The major health problem among school-going children is defective vision.

**Table 21. Common health problems - School Health Services**

#### Common health problems detected through health screening - 1998

Health problem	% of total pupils screened			
	Primary 1	Primary 6	Secondary 4	All levels
Defective vision	27.2	60.3	62.5	52.4
Obesity	10.9	13.8	11.8	10.9
Asthma	1.0	7.4	7.3	8.1
Underweight	1.7	14.7	6.5	3.3
Spinal	0.3	3.2	2.1	5.4

Source: SHS Annual Report 1998.

### Family planning

357. Family planning services are widely available and easily accessible. Contraceptives at a nominal fee are available at primary health clinics (private and government) and also available at obstetrics and gynaecological specialist clinics and the hospitals (private and government). Family planning is well accepted and the practice rate is 65 per cent of married women in the reproductive age group. The contraceptive methods commonly used are condoms (22 per cent), oral contraceptive pills (7 per cent), intrauterine devices (7 per cent) and traditional methods (13 per cent) such as the use of the withdrawal method and "safe period".

### AIDS/HIV

358. The first local case of HIV was diagnosed in 1985. In the first three months of 1998, another 44 Singaporeans were detected to be infected with HIV. This brought the total number of HIV-infected Singaporeans to 775 at 31 March 1998. Among them were 370 asymptomatic carriers, 144 with full-blown AIDS and 261 others who have died.

**Table 22. Distribution of HIV-infected Singaporeans by mode of transmission**

Mode of transmission	1985-1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	March 1998	Total
Sexual order table										
Heterosexual	16	22	37	47	62	83	103	135	36	541
Homosexual	31	11	12	6	15	17	12	12	4	120
Bisexual	12	3	3	9	9	10	20	15	3	84
Intravenous drug use	1	3	1	2	0	0	4	5	0	16
Blood transfusion	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Renal transplant overseas	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	5
Prenatal (mother to child)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	6
Total	61	42	55	64	86	111	139	175	44	775

## **Control and prevention of AIDS**

359. The control and prevention of AIDS comes under the purview of MOH with the involvement of other government agencies and community groups. The National AIDS Control Programme was drawn up in 1985 and comprises the following elements:

Public education and education of high-risk groups;

Counselling for high-risk groups;

Legislation;

Protection of the national blood supply;

Management of the infected;

Monitoring of the disease;

Personnel training;

Research.

360. Although many advances have been made in the care of HIV/AIDS patients, no cure or vaccine has been developed yet. Health education and safe practices continue to be the mainstay for the control of HIV/AIDS. The main focus of Singapore's programme against AIDS is therefore health education targeted at the general population as well as those at risk of infection. Various forms of communication, including pamphlets, posters, exhibitions, talks, workshops, forums and the mass media, are used to convey to the public information on AIDS, the modes of transmission, high-risk activities, the precautionary measures and the importance and need to practise them.

361. Public education is sustained throughout the year. A month is also devoted each year to more intensive public education. The AIDS Awareness Month has been held in conjunction with World AIDS Day on 1 December since 1987. This has resulted in a high general level of awareness of the disease and its mode of transmission.

362. With the changing trend of HIV transmission in Singapore, the educational message is focused on the dangers of casual sex, as HIV-positive persons cannot be identified by appearance. Messages to promote family values and to avoid premarital and extramarital sexual relationships have been strongly intensified. The use of condoms for prevention is emphasized to those at risk of infection.

363. To reach out to all youths in Singapore, all secondary school leavers and students from the Institutes of Technical Education are given lectures on AIDS and STDs. In 1993, a structured AIDS education programme was implemented for students in polytechnics, junior colleges and pre-university centres. AIDS education is also provided for all National Servicemen.

364. Certain legal measures were also taken to combat the disease in the interest of both the infected and the general public. HIV infection and AIDS were made notifiable diseases under the Infectious Diseases Act in 1985. To further tighten the control of AIDS in Singapore, the Infectious Diseases Act was amended in 1992 to include provisions:

(a) Empowering the Director of Medical Services to require any person diagnosed with AIDS or infected with HIV to undergo counselling or to comply with specified safety measures;

(b) To make it an offence for any person who knows that he is infected with HIV or has AIDS to commit any act which is likely to transmit the disease to another person, e.g. through sexual intercourse with another person or to donate blood at any blood bank in Singapore; and

(c) Protecting the identity of an HIV-infected person so as to prevent discrimination against him/her as well as to encourage those who are at risk of infection to come forward for counselling and HIV testing.

365. Stringent measures are undertaken to safeguard the national blood supply from HIV infection and other blood-borne diseases. These measures include:

(a) Testing of blood and blood products for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B and C; and

(b) Stringent donor selection at the pre-donation stage. All potential donors are interviewed and have to complete a specially designed detailed questionnaire on past and present risk activities associated with HIV infection. These measures are targeted at making persons at risk of such diseases exclude themselves from giving blood. Every potential donor is then counselled by a doctor, following which he signs a declaration to say that he has not made a false statement. Donors making false declarations may face prosecution. This is to deter anyone with high-risk behaviour from donating blood that may be infected.

366. Singapore also has facilities for autologous blood donation to allow persons to store their own blood for elective operations. This measure eliminates the risk of a person contracting blood-borne diseases such as AIDS from another person's blood.

### **Management of the infected**

367. Individuals who perceive themselves to be at risk of infection are encouraged to undergo HIV screening. Facilities for screening are widely available. Counselling provides an opportunity for a change in lifestyle and risk behaviour. Cases are managed at the Communicable Disease Centre by doctors and other staff who are specially trained to manage such cases. All patients with AIDS/HIV infection are counselled regularly to ensure compliance with treatment. Their sex partners are also counselled and screening is carried out for those who have been exposed to the infection. Face-to-face counselling is given to those with high-risk behaviour.

368. An AIDS telephone helpline started in 1987 provides anonymous personal counselling to the public. Recorded information on AIDS in the four main languages is provided.

369. A voluntary organization, Action for AIDS, formed in 1988, complements the Government's efforts in controlling AIDS. Its objectives are to promote educational activities relating to AIDS and HIV infection, support welfare activities for and prevent discrimination against patients and families, and promote research in areas related to HIV infection and AIDS.

370. MOH works closely with other relevant ministries, community groups and international bodies in the training of personnel for the effective control of AIDS. Courses have been jointly organized by the Ministry and external bodies such as the Fogarty Foundation/University of California Los Angeles School of Public Health for doctors, nurses, counsellors and laboratory technicians. All medical and paramedical personnel have been issued with "Guidelines for Preventing Transmission of Bloodborne Infection in a Health Care Setting".

371. Research projects and studies are regularly carried out to evaluate existing programmes and gather information for planning future control programmes. Monitoring of the AIDS situation in Singapore is routinely carried out. Recent studies showed that the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child is reduced through early detection and early treatment. Since January 1998, doctors have been advised to screen antenatal mothers for HIV infection so that measures can be instituted for those found infected. This reduces the number of children with HIV infections through perinatal transmission. These tests are available at subsidized rates in all government clinics and institutions.

372. An ASEAN Task Force on AIDS set up in March 1993 monitors the regional situation and initiates joint planning and implementation of a regional programme against HIV/AIDS. This includes exchange of information and cooperation in research and training.

### **Sexually transmitted disease (STDs)**

373. The incidence of STDs in Singapore has made a steady decline in the last decade. There were 271 and 286 adolescents (aged 10-19 years) who were reported to have STDs in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

### **Traditional medicine and practices**

374. The use of traditional Chinese medicines (TCM) is widely practised in Singapore. There are local training schools in TCM. A Traditional Chinese Medicine Unit was set up in MOH in 1995. The aim was to improve the standard of practice of TCM. It monitors reports of adverse effects and complications arising from TCM practice and usage. A Chinese Proprietary Medicine (CPM) Unit was set up by MOH under the purview of the Pharmaceutical Service to look into implementation of control measures for CPM through licensing product importers and local CPM manufacturers.

375. Through health education, children and parents are taught about dangers of traditional practices which may be unhealthy. Under the law, persons who carry out fraudulent practices can be prosecuted.

### **Training for health-care personnel**

376. MOH places emphasis on training for all health-care professionals to upgrade the quality of health care. It sponsors health-care professionals for formal postgraduate courses, both locally and overseas, and for practical attachments to renowned centres overseas. Internationally recognized experts are invited to lecture, conduct teaching sessions and demonstrate surgical procedures to the local medical and dental staff. In 1995, 49 medical, dental, nursing and paramedical experts were invited.

377. The National University of Singapore undertakes undergraduate training for doctors, dentists and pharmacists. MOH via its various medical boards also registers qualified professionals from recognized overseas universities. Nanyang Polytechnic provides undergraduate training of nurses by offering the Diploma in Nursing course.

378. There are 15 health and health-related departments in Singapore which have been designated as WHO Collaborating Centres. These Centres work with WHO to carry out field studies and serve as reference and training centres for the region. For example, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office assisted MOH in setting up the Acupuncture Research Clinic. Opened in September 1998, the Clinic undertakes clinical research on medical conditions for which acupuncture is said to be effective, such as chronic pain management.

### **General comments**

379. Singapore's standard in health care for its population is similar to those of advanced industrialized countries. There has been increasing budgetary allocation for the preventive aspects of reproductive health and strong preventive health and education programmes with special emphasis on the well-being of mothers and children.

380. Plans for the future include improving the quality of clinical services and professional manpower, and control of costs to patients and the Government. The Ministry of Health hopes to promote the health of Singaporeans by encouraging healthy lifestyles and preventing disease while ensuring access to good and affordable basic health care in the event of illness.

## **D. Social security (art. 26)**

### **Social security and financial assistance**

381. Singapore has a Public Assistance scheme<sup>19</sup> to help individuals and families, including children, who are in genuine need of help. The Government also gives grants and subsidies to charities who run programmes for the low income groups. The Public Assistance scheme and various other forms of financial assistance are targeted at helping needy families, especially those with young dependants.



382. However, Singapore has a social security savings scheme jointly supported by employees, employers and the Government. This scheme, called the Central Provident Fund (CPF), was established in 1955 to provide financial security for workers in their old age or when they are no longer able to work. Over the years, it has evolved into a comprehensive social security savings scheme, which not only takes care of a member's old age, health-care needs and home ownership, but also provides financial protection to members and their families through its insurance schemes. In addition, members are eligible for various schemes which offer financial protection benefits to the members and their dependants, which may include spouse, parents and children. The schemes are:

(a) The MediShield Scheme, a low-cost medical insurance scheme which helps the insured meet the treatment cost of serious and prolonged illness. CPF members may use their CPF savings to pay the insurance premiums for their dependants who are covered under MediShield;

(b) The Dependants Protection Scheme, which provides CPF members and their dependants with financial assistance in the event that the members become permanently incapacitated or die prematurely;

(c) The Home Protection Scheme, which protects CPF members and their dependants from losing their homes should the members become permanently incapacitated or die prematurely before their housing loans are settled.

383. There is no compulsory CPF contribution for non-working adults. However, to help members set aside enough savings for their basic old age and health-care needs, voluntary contributions to their CPF accounts are encouraged. For example, the CPF contribution of a non-working woman can be from her working husband or children. The contributions can be in the form of cash or from the CPF accounts of the contributing members. These housewives will then receive monthly payments from the age of 60 years onwards. This will ensure that they have an income during their old age. As such, non-working adults can participate in the CPF system and enjoy all its benefits, which serve as a form of social security for them.

384. The Community Development Council (CDC)<sup>20</sup> has the authority, responsibility and funds to help the less able and less successful in its neighbourhood. CDC aims to build a closely knit and cohesive community where a seamless delivery of social services is rendered if necessary. CDC plans, initiates and manages community policies and programmes. These include financial assistance for medical treatment (Medifund), scholarships and bursaries, study loans, community libraries, recreational facilities and various social assistance schemes. CDC also organizes community projects to cater to the needs of the elderly, children, the poor and the disabled.

385. Each CDC is provided with a start-up grant of S\$ 1 per resident living in that CDC. It also receives donations of funds from well-wishers. For every S\$ 1 of donation received, the Government provides an additional S\$ 3. These funds are channelled towards the activities and programmes of the CDC. This system is a manifestation of the Government's belief that a local

community will produce better results when given the authority and responsibility to look after its well-being, rather than one that is managed centrally by the Government. The Government hopes that the establishment of CDCs will help build a tightly knit, compassionate and self-reliant community.

### **General comments**

386. The Government has plans to refine the CPF system to ensure that Singaporeans have adequate savings to meet their needs in old age and for medical care. It plans to explore new avenues for members to invest their savings for higher returns, taking into consideration the changing workforce profile and ageing population. For the self-employed, the Government aims to encourage them to save beyond Medisave to better meet their old age needs. It will also encourage members to plan early for adequate financial security for their retirement. These measures are aimed at protecting the interests of Singaporeans by empowering them with sufficient resources to be self-reliant and independent and to circumvent situations of helplessness and vulnerability.

387. During the economic crisis in Asia in 1998, Singapore was not spared totally even though our strong fundamentals stood us in good stead and international investors commended Singapore for the way the crisis was handled. Retrenchments hit a total of 28,300 against the previous high of 19,529 in 1985. During the economic downturn then, CDCs provided counselling and job matching services, and assisted those who faced difficulties with expenses for utilities, medical care and education. The role of CDCs will continue to be enhanced to serve the people. The Government hopes to see the CDCs taking on some of the tasks currently undertaken by the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Health and other agencies. This move will be in tandem with Singapore's vision to foster a stronger participation in community programmes by the residents in their respective districts.

### **E. Childcare services and facilities (art. 18, para. 3)**

388. Singapore places importance on the well-being of the family unit. It believes that strong, cohesive families are better able to provide a nurturing environment for the physical, emotional, mental and social development security of children and family members.

389. With families in Singapore becoming smaller and the population ageing rapidly and birth rates declining, Singapore expects that family care responsibilities will increase. To support the family in its care of its children and other dependent members, the Government promotes the development of a range of schemes, services and programmes to meet the varying needs of families and to support the families in the care of their dependants. These facilities are established as standard features in the community to ensure that they are available and accessible to all Singaporeans. These include childcare centres and student care centres to help mothers with the care arrangements of their children (details of which are covered elsewhere) and family-friendly work practices.

390. In his National Day Rally 2000 speech, the Prime Minister announced the Children Development Co-Savings Scheme (or Baby Bonus) and the paid maternity leave for the third child. In addition, the Prime Minister also announced several supporting measures to promote marriage and procreation so as to create a total environment conducive to raising a family. These include the Government's taking the lead as a family-friendly employer, as well as ensuring more and better childcare centres.

### **Creating a pro-family environment**

#### **Baby Bonus and third child paid maternity leave**

391. The Baby Bonus and paid maternity leave for the third child are measures introduced by the Government to help address part of the financial costs of raising children.

392. The Baby Bonus is a two-tiered grant. In the first tier, the Government will provide S\$ 500 and S\$ 1,000 per year for second- and third-order births respectively from 1 April 2001. The second tier is an annual co-payment scheme, where Government will match the parents' contribution dollar-for-dollar up to S\$ 1,000 per year for the second child and up to S\$ 2,000 per year for the third. Both tiers of the grant will be given for six years and placed in a Children Development Account (CDA) for any of their children's educational and developmental needs.

393. The third child paid maternity leave scheme allows women who have their third child to claim eight weeks of paid maternity leave. However, the cost of that leave would be borne by the Government, subject to a cap of S\$ 20,000. Both this scheme and the Baby Bonus only apply when the children are Singapore citizens and legitimate.

#### **Government as a family-friendly employer**

394. In addition, the Government has decided to implement the following work practices that would allow its employees to support its efforts in creating a pro-family focus via a balanced work-life environment:

- (a) To allow three days of paid marriage leave for the first marriage with effect from 1 October 2000;
- (b) To allow three days of paternity leave for male civil servants for their first three children with effect from 1 October 2000;
- (c) To allow teleworking, where practical, as an alternative working arrangement, particularly for parents with young children; and
- (d) To allow individual ministries and departments to implement flexible work arrangements, as long as there is no loss of productivity and lapse in service standards to the public.

395. The above measures are in addition to the many pro-family measures that had been introduced in the civil service, such as:

- (a) No-pay leave for childcare of up to four years for each child;
- (b) Part-time employment for working mothers for up to three years regardless of the age of the child; and
- (c) Full-pay leave of five days per year per child for the first three children to look after a sick child aged 6 years and below.

### **Care facilities for children**

#### **Childcare centres for pre-schoolers**

396. In 1984, the Government implemented a national childcare centre programme to promote the development of childcare centre facilities for children up to age 7 years as part of its support to working mothers. (Details of the Government's assistance to employers and non-profit organizations for the development and operation of such facilities are given under article 4 above.) The total enrolment for childcare centres as at 31 March 2000 was 35,343 children. This includes both full-day and half-day programmes. The total number of childcare centres as at 31 March 2000 was 567.

397. A 1997 Population Planning Section (Ministry of Health) survey on newly married couples showed that childcare availability was the second most commonly cited factor influencing the decision on family size, after finance. Hence, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) will increase the number of childcare places by 25 per cent over the next three years, that is by about 12,000 to 58,000 places. The focus will be in neighbourhood housing estates where the demand is highest. Parents can also look forward to more trained childcare teachers. MCDS will also work with grass-roots organizations to remove obstacles so as to encourage more informal infant care arrangements in the community.

398. To support parents who use these childcare centres, the Government provides childcare subsidy to all working parents who are Singapore citizens or permanent residents, to help them defray the cost of payment of childcare fees. The Government gives S\$ 150 per child per month or S\$ 75 per child per month for placement of a child in a full-day or half-day care programmes, respectively. For non-working mothers, the subsidy is S\$ 75 per child per month. The Government's expenditure on childcare subsidies totalled about S\$ 51.6 million (US\$ 31.9 million) in financial year 1998 and S\$ 54 million (US\$ 33.3 million) in financial year 1999.

399. In addition to the government subsidy, there are financial assistance schemes to help mothers from low-income families who want to work and need childcare arrangements. These are the Centre-Based Financial Assistance Scheme for Childcare (CFAC) and the Back to Work Childcare Scheme.

(a) CFAC helps low-income families with additional subsidy over and above the universal childcare subsidy provided by Government. CFAC provides relief for families who find it difficult to pay for childcare services despite the government subsidy. Successful applicants are given a subsidy of between 75 per cent to 95 per cent of the average non-profit childcare centre fee depending on household income;

(b) The Back to Work Childcare Scheme implemented by MCDS in August 1998 helps mothers with a one-time grant to help meet costs of deposit, first month's fees, registration fees, uniforms (maximum two sets) and insurance which are charged by childcare centres. The scheme helps mothers get their children started on the childcare programme. Eligible mothers are given up to S\$ 1,000 (US\$ 617) for each child.

400. Mindful that a well-qualified childcare staff is the linchpin of ensuring good quality pre-school programmes, childcare centres are required to employ suitably qualified personnel trained at the certificate and diploma levels in pre-school education who would be equipped with appropriate pedagogical practices and competencies to help leverage the overall quality and standards of pre-school in Singapore and provide for the optimum development of young children by enhancing the physical, social, intellectual and emotional aspects of children's development. With effect from January 2001, a new pre-school education (PSE) Framework for Teacher Training and Accreditation was introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS), in a joint initiative to enhance the quality of pre-school education in Singapore. The PSE Framework provides guidelines in areas such as teacher training requirements and training programmes to ensure consistent standards and quality in pre-school education. Various categories of pre-school personnel such as supervisors, childcare teachers and childcare assistants undergo the required training so that they are fully equipped with the appropriate knowledge and competencies in order to provide effectively for the young children.

401. A Pre-School Qualifications Accreditation Committee (PQAC) jointly steered by MOE and MCDS looks into the accreditation of training programmes for pre-school personnel, the curriculum of local training agencies and the accreditation of overseas pre-school qualifications obtained by individuals. The Committee has accredited the teacher-training courses offered by the following training agencies in Singapore:

- (a) Advent Links - Southeast Asian Union College;
- (b) Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore);
- (c) Kinderland Learning Centre;
- (d) National Institute of Education;

- (e) Ngee Ann Polytechnic;
- (f) PCF Early Childhood Institute;
- (g) Regional Training and Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education, Asia;
- (h) Singapore Institute of Management.

### **Student care centres for school-going children (SCC)**

402. The SCC programme, or before-and-after school centres for schoolchildren up to 14 years of age, is targeted at helping working parents who need alternative care arrangements for their school-going children who would otherwise be left unattended on their own when parents work. These centres keep children constructively occupied before and after school hours and reduce the exposure to negative influence and risks. These SCCs are either school-based or community-based centres and are run by non-profit organizations or private operators.

403. The Government provides fee assistance for children from low-income families who place their children in non-profit SCCs run by NGOs. This ensures that SCCs are affordable to parents who need to place their children in SCCs. The fee assistance is issued on a sliding scale based on household income of the family.

404. The Government encourages the development and operation of SCCs by non-profit organizations. (Details of the Government support to non-profit organizations are under article 4 above.)

### **Family Service Centres (FSCs)**

405. The Government actively promotes the development of Family Service Centres (FSCs) to provide support service to help families and individuals in the community. FSCs are developed at major housing estates to make social services accessible and available at the neighbourhood level. They provide a range of services for both the adults and children and adopt a family-focused approach in the delivery of services. The range of programmes provided are casework and counselling for individuals and families, student care, supervised play, and toy and book libraries. These centres also actively promote Family Life Education (FLE). Government provides capital and recurrent funding to non-profit organizations which set up Family Service Centres. As at the end of 2000, there were 27 FSCs. The Government has plans to develop eight more FSCs by the year 2001.

### **Family life education and parent education**

406. Singapore adopts a multi-pronged approach towards educating its people in family life. These programmes are aimed mainly at promoting the well-being of the family and enhancing

family life. Parent education is actively promoted to help parents in their role and enhance parenting skills. To reinforce the importance of building strong and close-knit families amidst busy careers and lifestyles, MCDS organizes an annual National Family Week. In addition, MCDS produces newsletters, videos, pamphlets, handbooks and television programmes on family life for the purpose of public education.

407. Public education has a wide reach but the Government recognizes that it cannot be expected to impart family skills and experience in a significant way. To this end, MCDS organizes talks, seminars, workshops and other activities, on topics ranging from married life to parenting. These talks are also being organized by NGOs. MCDS provides funding support, produces resource materials for the NGOs use, as well as sources for recruits and trains the facilitators and trainers for these sessions.

#### **F. Standard of living (art. 27)**

408. This article recognizes the right of the child to an adequate standard of living. The primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capabilities, the necessary living conditions for the child's development lies with the parents or the guardians of the child. The State's role is primarily to provide the framework and to enable parents and others responsible for the child to implement their rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis the child.

409. There are legal provisions to ensure parental responsibility in the care of children. Section 68 of the Women's Charter states that "except where an agreement or order of court otherwise provides, it shall be the duty of a parent to maintain or contribute to the maintenance of his or her children, whether they are in his or her custody or the custody of any other person, and whether they are legitimate or illegitimate, either by providing them with such accommodation, clothing, food and education as may be reasonable having regard to his or her means and station in life or by paying the cost thereof".

#### **Housing**

410. Public housing for children is considered in the context of the family nucleus. A child can be included in his/her parent's application for an HDB flat as an occupier to form the family nucleus. A family nucleus can comprise of an:

- (a) Applicant and his spouse, with children;
- (b) Applicant (single, above 21 years) and his/her parents, with siblings; or
- (c) Applicant (widowed, separated or divorced) and children legally in his/her custody.

411. In the event of the death of a child's parents who are the lessees of an existing HDB flat, the administrator of the deceased's estate will be allowed to manage the flat for the child, on condition that the ownership of the flat is transferred to the child when he/she reaches 21 years of age. This aspect of the Government's lease administration on retention of flats serves to protect the rights of the child to take over ownership of his/her deceased parents' flat upon reaching the age of 21 years. The Housing and Development Act also allows a trust to be created for the minor child as beneficiary of the deceased parents' flat.

412. In the event of the death of a child's parents who are the tenants of an existing HDB rental flat, the tenancy of the flat can be transferred to a citizen guardian for the child, on condition that it will be transferred back to the child when he reaches 21 years of age.

413. Children without surviving parents are eligible to apply for public housing under the Orphans Scheme. One sibling must be at least 21 years of age at the time of application.

#### **Financial and other assistance**

414. Singapore has a wide range of schemes, programmes and services to help those in genuine need of assistance. The Government, voluntary welfare organizations, community groups and self-help groups run a range of financial and other support services, schemes and programmes to help individuals and families. No one who is genuinely in need will be denied assistance. Special focus is placed on the welfare and well-being of children, especially children of families where parents are unable to provide adequate care for them. Schools, government clinics and social service agencies assist to identify children at risk and extend necessary assistance to these children and their families. Where the agencies are not able to assist, these children and their families are assisted with referral to relevant government and non-governmental agencies for supportive help, including financial assistance. The services and support available to families in the care of their children besides those already mentioned earlier in this report include free or subsidized tuition to help children from disadvantaged families to cope with their studies, free textbooks and allowances for school, and assistance in alternative care arrangements if parents are incarcerated or in no position to look after their children.

### **VIII. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

415. The Singapore Government places a very high premium on the education of Singaporeans. Singapore aims to make its standard of education among the best in the world. The objective of education in Singapore is to prepare our children for the process of lifelong learning to cope with the constantly changing world and build a responsible, cohesive and robust society. The school curriculum and education programmes are aimed at producing well-rounded and morally upright individuals, who are fully conversant with the latest technological advances and yet are in touch with their Asian heritage.

416. Education continues to be a major item of public expenditure, accounting for about 22.4 per cent of the total government recurrent expenditure. A substantial proportion of



the cost of education is subsidized by the State. A considerable amount of money is invested in the education of each student. The table below shows the government recurrent expenditure on education per student.

**Table 23. Government recurrent expenditure on education per student**

	1987	1992	1997	1998	1999
Primary schools	S\$ 1 474 (US\$ 910)	S\$ 2 061 (US\$ 1 272)	S\$ 2 960 (US\$ 1 827)	S\$ 2 865 (US\$ 1 769)	S\$ 2 655 (US\$ 1 639)
Secondary schools	S\$ 2 042 (US\$ 1 260)	S\$ 3 129 (US\$ 1 931)	S\$ 4 469 (US\$ 2 758)	S\$ 4 516 (US\$ 2 788)	S\$ 4 852 (US\$ 2 995)
Junior colleges	S\$ 2 643 (US\$ 1 631)	S\$ 4 780 (US\$ 2 950)	S\$ 7 052 (US\$ 4 353)	S\$ 6 489 (US\$ 4 006)	S\$ 6 011 (US\$ 3 710)
Institute of technical education	S\$ 3 631 (US\$ 2 241)	S\$ 6 201 (US\$ 3 828)	S\$ 8 942 (US\$ 5 520)	S\$ 7 384 (US\$ 4 558)	S\$ 6 900 (US\$ 4 259)
Polytechnics	S\$ 4 219 (US\$ 2 604)	S\$ 6 142 (US\$ 3 791)	S\$ 8 856 (US\$ 5 467)	S\$ 8 466 (US\$ 5 226)	S\$ 8 016 (US\$ 4 948)
Universities	S\$ 11 993 (US\$ 7 403)	S\$ 15 422 (US\$ 9 520)	S\$ 19 926 (US\$ 12 300)	S\$ 15 881 (US\$ 9 803)	S\$ 14 922 (US\$ 9 211)

Source: Ministry of Education (Yearbook of Statistics 2000).

Note: Data refer to the financial year which begins in March and ends in April of the following year.

Conversion rate used: S\$ 1.62 = US\$ 1.

417. Although Singapore currently does not practise compulsory education, education at the primary and secondary levels is almost universal. However, for each age cohort of children that registers at primary 1 in national primary schools, 2 per cent (about 1,000 children) are not in school and this is a cause of concern to the Government. About 1 per cent of these children are registered in private schools, e.g. the madrasahs (Islamic religious schools), or are home-schoolers. The other 1 per cent could not be contacted.

418. Singapore's survival and prosperity in the twenty-first century will depend on how well prepared Singaporeans are for the challenges of the globalized knowledge-based economy (KBE), as well as their social cohesion and sense of commitment to the nation. The education system thus seeks to promote the holistic development of the child and the Government is committed to ensuring that every child has an equal head start in education in order to develop his/her potential to the full.

419. In view of this, the Government has, after extensive discussions with community leaders, interest groups and members of the public, decided to make the six-year primary education in national schools compulsory with effect from January 2003, starting with the cohort entering primary 1 that year. The Compulsory Education (CE) Bill was passed by the Singapore Parliament in October 2000 to effect this change.

420. Compulsory primary education is defined as education in national schools for Singapore citizens residing in Singapore. Parents who fail to register their children in primary 1 in such schools from 2003 will be counselled to do so. Every effort at counselling and mediation will be made to ensure that they send their children to school. If these efforts fail, as a last resort, the force of the law can be brought upon such parents.

421. However, in view of the reality of the situation in Singapore, exemptions from CE are given to four categories of pupils. These categories are:

(a) Pupils of madrasahs. The madrasah plays an important role in producing religious scholars and religious teachers for the Muslim community. The madrasahs feel that the training for these scholars and teachers needs to begin from a young age, and that they will not be able to attract enough students at the secondary level if all children had to attend national schools at the primary level under CE. On the other hand, there is a concern that madrasah graduates who do not become religious teachers and scholars will not be well equipped for jobs in the KBE as the focus of their education is on religious subjects. After much discussion, it was decided that with effect from 2003, individual primary 1 pupils of the madrasahs could be exempted from CE, provided the madrasahs meet a certain minimum standard at the national Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) offered at primary 6 when these pupils sit for the examination. This is to ensure that children who receive their primary education in madrasahs achieve a minimum level of academic attainment. The total annual primary 1 intake of Singaporean pupils into the six full-time madrasahs is capped at 400;

(b) Pupils of San Yu Adventist School. The San Yu Adventist School is owned and operated by the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission of Singapore. It is a small school with a population, in 1999, of 73 at the primary level and 222 at the secondary level. The school's mission is to provide Christian education parallel with the Singapore education system. As the school has historically been offering education to Singaporeans, its contribution is recognized. Hence, Singaporean pupils of the school at the primary level have also been given individual exemption from CE. The school, like the madrasahs, must meet a certain minimum standard at the PSLE. However, based on the school's primary 1 intake of less than 10 Singaporean pupils in recent years, the total annual primary 1 intake of Singapore citizens into the school is capped at 10;

(c) Children receiving home schooling. A small number of parents have strong views on how their children should be brought up and educated. They choose to educate their children at home, using curriculum packages designed for home-schoolers from abroad. As these parents are very keen on how they want to educate their children, it has been decided that such children are allowed exemption from CE. However, their parents must be able to satisfy the MOE that the two key objectives of CE can be achieved for their children. These two objectives are:

- (i) To give our children a common core of knowledge which will provide a strong foundation for further education and training to prepare them for a knowledge-based economy;
- (ii) To give children a common educational experience which will help to build national identity and cohesion.

The parents are also required to furnish information on the curriculum and educational outcomes of the home-schooling programme. The progress of the home-schoolers would be closely monitored. They will be required to sit for tests at certain points of their primary education and as well as the PSLE. They would have to meet the same PSLE standard as the children attending the San Yu Adventist School. The MOE reserves the right to withdraw its approval for exemption from CE at any stage. These stringent requirements for home-schoolers to be exempted from CE will help the MOE to ensure that home schooling is not used by irresponsible parents as a loophole to circumvent the introduction of CE and hence negate the purpose for which CE is introduced;

(d) Children with special needs. Several options are currently open for the education of children with special needs. Children with mild and sensory disabilities but who are able to cope with mainstream schools attend such schools which incorporate the appropriate facilities and resources. Children with moderate and profound disabilities are educated in special education (SPED) schools established by voluntary welfare organizations with the help of the MOE and the National Council of Social Service. There are also home-based programmes for such children. While children with learning disabilities are much more able to develop their full potential if they attend SPED schools, the enforcement of CE may be unduly harsh on the parents of such children. Therefore, it has been decided that special needs children who are not able to attend national schools because of physical/intellectual disabilities be automatically exempted from CE.

422. Education is heavily subsidized in Singapore. In the primary school, Singaporean pupils and those who are children of Singaporeans do not pay school fees. (Those in the secondary school and junior college pay only S\$ 5 and S\$ 6 respectively per month.) Non-citizen pupils in the primary school pay school fees at different rates. Those whose parents are permanent residents, employment pass holders and diplomats of foreign embassies pay a concessionary rate of S\$ 36 (about US\$ 20) per annum. Other non-citizens pay S\$ 960 (about US\$ 640) per annum. Still, these rates are much lower than the actual cost (S\$ 2,865) per annum of educating a child in primary school.

423. However, in line with the philosophy that parents must be responsible for their children's education, miscellaneous fees are charged to all pupils in order to meet part of the cost of materials and supplies that are used in school. The rate of the miscellaneous fees at the primary school level is S\$ 10 per month. Nevertheless, if there are needy pupils who need assistance to pay these fees, there are several assistance schemes from schools and community agencies to help. No child in Singapore is deprived of an education because his parents cannot afford to pay the fees charged in school.

424. The Government's move to introduce CE in 2003 shows that it is very serious about wanting to ensure that every child gets a good head start in the national primary schools, which are by far the largest providers of education with a population of about 300,000 pupils annually. In contrast, the number of pupils exempted from CE is very small. To a large degree, therefore, Singapore is meeting the requirements of article 28 (1) (a) of the Convention, although a reservation on it has been entered.

**A. Education, including vocational training and guidance (art. 28),  
and aims of education (art. 29)**

**Pupil enrolment**

425. Virtually all children of school-going age are in mainstream primary or secondary schools. The table below shows the enrolment of pupils (both male and female) in the various educational institutions.

**Table 24. Enrolment in the various educational institutions (1999)**

	Institutions	Total	Males	Females
Primary schools	199	300 153	155 513	144 640
Secondary schools	152	173 007	90 592	82 415
Junior colleges and centralized institutes	16	25 032	11 342	13 690
Institutes of technical education	10	16 390	12 089	4 301
Polytechnics	4	57 126	32 135	24 991
National Institute of Education	1	3 317	990	2 327
Universities	2	47 347	26 902	20 445
Total	384	622 372	329 563	292 809

Source: Ministry of Education (Yearbook of Statistics 2000).

426. There are some Muslim parents who prefer to send their children to madrasahs (Islamic religious schools) for their education. Academic subjects such as English, mathematics and the Malay language are taught in addition to the study of Islam. The table below shows the number of children who are studying in madrasahs.

**Table 25. Number of children studying in madrasahs**

	1996	1997	1998	1999
7 to below 12 years	2 717	2 676	2 638	2 615
12 to below 18 years	701	861	1 046	1 290
Total	3 418	3 537	3 684	3 905

## Education system

427. Most children in Singapore begin their education in kindergartens or childcare centres before proceeding to primary schools for their formal education. In 1998, there were 421 kindergartens, all privately run, with 104,464 pupils. There were 567 childcare centres as at March 2000. By the age of 18 years, students would have completed their secondary, vocational and post-secondary education and would have almost completed polytechnic education. To make these different forms of education available and accessible to every child, 199 primary schools, 152 secondary schools, 14 junior colleges (JCs), 2 centralized institutes (CIs), 14 institutes of technical education (ITE) centres and 4 polytechnics had been established as at February 1999. The current pupil per teacher ratio is presented in the table below.

**Table 26. Number of pupils per teacher**

Year	1989	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Primary	26	24	25	26	25	25	25
Secondary	22	22	23	22	21	20	19

Source. Yearbook of Statistics 2000.

428. Pupils attend school regularly. When they show signs of dropping out of school, it is viewed with deep concern by the school authorities. School principals and teachers do their utmost to give close attention to these pupils at risk and their parents. They are counselled by teachers and, in some cases, by professional counsellors. If these efforts fail, the cases can be referred to the self-help groups of the various ethnic communities in Singapore for assistance. These groups are often able to do more as families identify better with them. Even if the efforts of these groups fail, the principals will still readmit such pupils if they want to rejoin the school system within a reasonable period of time. The percentage of pupils dropping out of school is small. In 1997, out of 467,523 pupils in the primary and secondary schools, 1,798 (0.38 per cent) left school prematurely. In 1998, out of a population of 467,106 pupils in primary and secondary schools, 1,580 (0.34 per cent) left school prematurely. There are various efforts to reach out to pupils who have dropped out of school by the National Youth Council and other organizations with a view to helping these children and preventing them from getting into trouble.

## School curriculum

429. The school curriculum and the duration of schooling are customized to suit the differing abilities of the pupils. There are differentiated courses in the primary, secondary and post-secondary stages to allow pupils of different abilities to learn at a pace suitable to them so that they can develop to their fullest potential. Both male and female students follow a common curriculum. For those inclined towards technical studies, the various Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs) provide a wide range of courses in technical and business subjects where pupils undergo systematic and structured training programmes, lasting between one and two years. The training combines classroom instruction in basic technical and commercial theory with practical application sessions in workshops, laboratories and simulated industrial settings.

430. In the school, the students are provided with a curriculum that will enable them to keep in step with Singapore's modern economy. English, mathematics and science and information technology are given emphasis. To ensure that our pupils are in touch with their Asian heritage, the mother tongue is also given due emphasis. Values are taught directly through civics and moral education (CME), and indirectly through subjects like general paper, and language and literature lessons. The rights of individuals and groups are given due recognition. The concept of equal treatment for all, regardless of race, language and religion, gender and socio-economic status, is taught and practised. In CME, the rights of the citizen are also discussed under the topic of citizenship. Topics like religions and festivals emphasize the right of every individual to choose and practise his religion. Respect and tolerance are highlighted and strongly encouraged in the light of Singapore's multiracial and multi-religious society.

431. The importance of the family and filial responsibility are also inculcated in pupils. The teaching of CME includes components on the family where issues like family harmony and communication, roles in the family and responsible parenthood are focused on. The pupils are taught moral concepts such as family unity, love, respect and care for elders, communicating and cooperating with family members, sharing household responsibilities and upholding the sanctity of marriage and the importance of parenthood.

432. To keep in step with developments in information technology, schools are equipped with computers. Pupils are trained to use them. More computer software is also being used in teaching. Teachers and pupils also have access to the Internet.

433. Community service was made an integral part of our school curriculum in 1997. The Community Involvement Programme (CIP) gives the opportunity to each pupil in JCs and CIs to participate meaningfully in contributing to the community for at least six hours per year. By participating in the programme, they imbibe values such as commitment to community and country, respect for people of diverse beliefs, languages and cultures, care for the environment and concern and compassion for others. The programme also helps pupils prepare for adulthood so that they can take their place in society as responsible and good citizens on whom the nation can depend in the future.

434. The responsibility for caring for our natural environment is not overlooked in educating our children. The primary, secondary and pre-university curricula have topics on appreciation of the natural environment, ecological foundations, managing natural resources, study of pollution and environmental health and management. These topics are taught during English, science, health education, social studies, civics and moral education, home economics, geography and general paper lessons. To reinforce pupils' awareness of the need to respect and care for the environment, schools have encouraged their pupils to clear litter in parks and on beaches periodically. A pilot project to allow primary school pupils to be involved in the maintenance of parks and to use it as a learning resource was launched in 1997, involving two primary schools. In 1998, three more primary schools, two secondary schools and one junior college participated in the project.

435. Singapore schools, ITEs, polytechnics and universities have well-trained teachers and good teaching and learning facilities. They nurture and train pupils to enable them to cope with the demands of the modern economy and, as adult citizens later on, with the expectations of a modern nation. Visitors from the region and the world visit the Ministry of Education and our educational institutions to learn how the system is implemented. The National Institute of Education, which is the training agency for teachers, also provides training for schoolteachers from Brunei and the Maldives.

### **Gifted Education Programme (GEP)**

436. The GEP was implemented in Singapore in 1984 as it was recognized that there are pupils who are intellectually gifted and that there should be provisions to meet their needs. These pupils would have the opportunity to develop at their own pace commensurate with their intellectual ability and to achieve their own potential.

437. The GEP is essentially an enrichment programme. The enrichment programme is based on the syllabus of the national curriculum for regular classes. In the GEP, topics are dealt with in greater depth and breadth. Greater emphasis is placed on the development of creativity as well as critical thinking, problem-solving and enquiry skills. Pupils are encouraged to work independently on projects. They also have the opportunity to work with specialists in creative writing, the humanities, information technology and the sciences through mentorship programmes. Besides developing the intellectual capabilities of the pupils, a concern of the GEP is also developing pupils to be socially aware and to be committed to contributing to society.

438. The GEP starts at primary 4 and ends at secondary 4. There are two entry points to join the GEP; at primary 4 and secondary 1. GEP pupils are placed in special classes in mainstream schools, where they are able to interact with their schoolmates through participation in other programmes and co-curricular activities.

### **Community and parental involvement**

439. To provide a platform for schools, parents and the community to work together, a national-level advisory council, COMPASS (Community and Parents in Support of Schools), was formed in January 1999. It is chaired by the Education Minister. It draws its members from amongst principals, parents and the community. It aims:

- To actively encourage parents and the community to work together with schools to help children learn better;
- To be a forum where best practices on collaborative efforts of schools, homes and community in education can surface and be propagated;
- To act as Ministry of Education's first public audience for feedback on policies and programmes on parent and community support for schools; and
- To help the Ministry of Education communicate various messages relevant to school-home-community collaborations.

440. The formation of COMPASS is based on a recognition that the total education of the child depends on an active alliance of school, parents and the community. While the community at large supports education by contributing services, funds and resources, there remains a significant proportion of parents who find it difficult to participate in their children's total development due to the parents' lack of education, time or confidence. On the other hand, there are parents who want a say in their children's education, and relationships between these parents and teachers may come under strain should there be divergent views. COMPASS thus provides the opportunity for parents and the community to work together with schools for the benefit of children.

441. To this end, COMPASS has published a document, "Stakeholders in Education", which outlines the roles and qualities expected of each stakeholder - the child her-/himself, her/his parents and family, her/his teachers, her/his principal, MOE HQ, the community, business and industry, the Alumni Association, as well as the School Advisory/Management Committee - in helping the child learn and grow. With these statements, there will be a common understanding of the type of partnerships that can be undertaken and how the respective roles can be fulfilled.

### **Teachers**

442. The National Institute of Education (NIE) is responsible for the initial as well as ongoing training of teachers. It plays a pivotal role in ensuring that teachers develop the right values and attitudes, and are equipped to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively.

443. In March 1998, a Committee<sup>21</sup> was set up to review the role of training for teachers and to better prepare teachers for future challenges. The Government recognizes that the teacher is instrumental in everything that is carried out in the area of education and that success in educating children and youth depends critically on how well equipped the teachers are in carrying out their roles. The Committee also acknowledges the challenge of change facing teachers. Teacher training is thus now conceived as separate initial teacher training and continual teacher training to meet the respective required levels of quality and professionalism. The findings and recommendations arising from this Committee would serve as an important road map for the schools, the NIE and the MOE to realign the teacher training system to meet the needs of the education system for the twenty-first century.

444. To attract and retain good teachers, the MOE aims to recruit from the top one third of each cohort. The Ministry will proactively market teaching scholarships and awards, and look into ways to improve the terms and conditions of service as well as look after the well-being of teachers. It is hoped that these measures would create a good pool of professional resources to meet the needs of the students, where the skills and competencies of each child would be assessed individually to suit his own needs.

### **B. Leisure, recreation and cultural activities (art. 31)**

445. Children in Singapore enjoy equal rights to participate in cultural and artistic activities with adults. In fact, more efforts and resources are channelled to instil in them an interest in the arts, and to enable them to acquire some skills. We also hope to deepen their appreciation of the arts, in line with our objective of building a gracious society.



446. Singapore aims to be a global city of the arts, hosting the best of the East and West and presenting home-grown productions of an international standard. Coupled with a range of cultural activities, Singaporeans are encouraged to lead healthy lives through recreational activities and sports. Comprehensive facilities are developed to support a wide variety of activities.

### **The arts**

447. The National Arts Council<sup>22</sup> (NAC) promotes appreciation of the arts among young Singaporeans. To nurture and provide assistance to aspiring talents, NAC provides bursaries and scholarships to pursue their interests in the various art forms. In 1998, S\$ 3.7 million (US\$ 2.3 million) were given out through 19 financial assistance schemes. These schemes are categorized under training and general grants. Twenty full scholarships, 101 bursaries and 32 training grants worth a total of over S\$ 1 million (US\$ 630,000) were awarded to promising artists, arts students and arts groups for training and skills upgrading. General grants worth S\$ 2.6 million (US\$ 1.6 million) were given to support the productions, exhibitions and literary productions undertaken locally or overseas by 82 local artists and 125 arts groups.

448. Under the biennial Singapore Festival of the Arts that the NAC organizes, there are performances suitable for the young. As part of the Festival's fringe events, there is also a week of exciting and varied arts activities called "Fringe for Kids". From time to time, the NAC also brings in good quality overseas programmes suitable for children.

449. The NAC launched the Arts Education Programme (AEP) in schools in 1993 with the aim of promoting an appreciation of the arts among young Singaporeans. The Council hopes to give every student the opportunity of exposure to and experience in the arts. In 1998, 180,000 students in more than 200 schools participated in 1,450 activities. The AEP comprises six main art forms, music, theatre, dance, literature, the visual arts and film, and three themes:

(a) Arts Exposure. Arts Exposure programmes introduce students to a particular art form. They are approximately 30 to 40 minutes long and are presented in one of the following formats:

- (i) Performances, usually accompanied by an explanation about the background and development of the art form; and
- (ii) Talk-cum-demonstration;

(b) Arts Experience. These go one step further by providing opportunities for students to participate in the various art forms. More suitable for smaller groups of students, they are designed to be interactive, and to help build confidence, skills and expand students' capacity for creative thinking. Some programmes take the form of theatre-in-education, which helps students explore topical issues related to themselves, friends, family and society. School texts can also be made more interesting through drama-in-education programmes;

(c) Arts Excursions. Arts Excursions recognizes that an environment totally different from a classroom setting would increase students' interest in learning. Arts Excursions allow students to attend performances at formal performing venues, so they can visit museums, arts centres and theatres and participate in outdoor arts events. With Arts Excursions, students can visit artists' studios or rehearsal space to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the work and a chance to talk to artists, musicians, playwrights, directors, actors, administrators and organizers.

450. Apart from the programmes organized by the NAC, many children are actively involved in school choirs, school plays and performances. Many children in Singapore also attend art, drama and music classes organized by community centres and art societies.

451. To expand the range of post-secondary educational opportunities available in the arts, the Government has extended funding for diploma courses conducted by the LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, which are tertiary institutions specializing in arts education. The Government is also supporting the development of new or upgraded facilities for these institutions. To further encourage the development of the arts scene, a new Institute of the Arts (ITA) has been set up in the National University of Singapore (NUS) to conduct degree-level performing arts programmes in 2001.

## **Sports**

452. The promotion of sports and recreational activities and programmes for children come under the purview of both the Ministry of Education and the Singapore Sports Council (SSC).

453. In organizing its programmes and activities, the Singapore Sports Council considers their appropriateness to the age of the various participants. The SSC works closely with various community organizations and sports associations which offer many programmes to children and youths such as coaching assistance in specific sports as well as financial assistance for talented school athletes. The SSC's Learn-to-Play programmes for various sports and games are open to all members of the public, including children. Children use SSC's public sports facilities, such as swimming pools and badminton and tennis courts, at concessionary rates.

454. The SSC had its first conference on women in sports in Singapore in March 1999. The conference recognizes the potential for sport and physical activity to impact positively on women's and girls' lives, and highlights the importance of enhancing sporting opportunities for women and girls to participate fully in sports at all levels and in all functions and roles. It provided a platform to discuss the constraints faced by women and girls today in their quest for sports excellence in an effort to devise strategies to encourage more women and girls in Singapore to come forward and participate actively in sport and exercise.

455. To provide the pupils with a well-rounded education, co-curricular activities (CCA) are carried out in schools. The objectives of CCA include the promotion of physical health and development, the inculcation of moral, cultural and aesthetic development, and the development of self- and group-discipline and group loyalty. These objectives are achieved through a host of activities subsumed under three categories, viz. sports and games, uniformed groups and the arts, which include music and dance.

456. In primary schools, participation in CCA is encouraged. Schools select activities that appeal to pupils' interest in sports and games, uniformed groups and the arts. CCA is mandatory in secondary schools. Every school is expected to plan and implement a suitable, effective and meaningful CCA programme which is geared towards mass participation and which provides the more inclined to develop their potential to the fullest. Pupils are required to choose one CCA from the list of core activities comprising sports and games, uniformed groups and cultural activities. Ample time is given to these activities outside school hours and pupils are trained to hone their skills and knowledge in them.

457. In many of these activities, inter-school competitions are conducted and pupils are able to show their skills and talents. The culmination of the CCA programme is showcased at the annual Singapore Youth Festival where the schools, JCs and CIs take part to display their achievements in areas such as music, dance and drama performances, band displays, and arts and crafts exhibitions. In all the activities, the ability and talent of the pupils are clearly shown.

### **C. General comments**

#### **Education**

458. The Singapore Government realizes that the nation's continued success depends on how well it prepares its people, particularly our children, for the challenges ahead. Singapore has always placed a premium on education, and will continue to invest heavily in the young. Plans for the future include an emphasis on ability-driven education, to help each child recognize and make use of his or her talents and abilities. To do so, first there is identification and development of individual talents and abilities. Secondly, there is harnessing of talents and abilities, the inculcation of national values and social instincts in our young so as to allow them to contribute their talents actively for the good of society and the community.

459. The Government intends to put in place a conducive school environment to achieve the desired outcomes of education, which focus on the holistic development of the pupil as an individual and citizen. There will be emphasis on the physical environment as well as systems and structures that impact on how teaching and learning takes place. The curriculum will continue to be revised to infuse thinking skills and incorporate the use of IT in the design and delivery of syllabi. The new syllabi have been phased in from 2001 onwards, along with systemic changes to teaching strategies and learning resources. To provide students with opportunities to integrate knowledge, skills and values learnt in class, project work will be implemented in a non-assessment mode in all schools in 2001. The current system of assessments will also be reviewed to meet Singapore's objective of developing creative independent learners. A new university admissions system to be implemented from 2003, for example, will not rely on A-level results but make a more holistic evaluation of a person's potential.

460. In Singapore, where parents place much emphasis on education, the non-education of children is not a problem. Nevertheless, the Government and the community are concerned about the small number of children who are not enrolled in primary 1 by parents or who drop out

of school. The introduction of compulsory education from 2003 onwards is an indication of the Government's commitment to ensure that the potential and development of every child in Singapore is being looked into.

### **Pre-school education**

461. MOE will be more involved in pre-school education, investing in curriculum design and teacher training, conducting research and tightening regulations. Pilot research will also be conducted to ascertain the most effective way for MOE to work with pre-school centres to prepare children for school learning.

462. A Steering Committee on Pre-School Education has been formed to oversee the necessary changes that will help raise the quality of pre-school education in Singapore. The committee will come up with an overall policy framework for the development of pre-school education in Singapore. This will include the desired outcomes of pre-school education in Singapore, developmentally appropriate pre-school curricula, the planning and implementation of pilot research projects, the establishment of systems and structures for the training of pre-school teachers, and tightening of regulations for pre-schools and kindergartens.

## **IX. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES**

463. The Singapore Constitution and laws accord protection for the vulnerable against exploitation and abuse, and individuals against unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Singapore does not tolerate exploitation of those who are vulnerable, particularly where it concerns children and women and girls.

464. This chapter touches on children in situations of emergency, children in conflict with the law, children in situations of exploitation, and children belonging to a minority or indigenous group.

### **A. Children in situations of emergency**

#### **1. Refugee children (art. 22)**

465. Singapore is geographically one of the smallest independent countries in the world and one of the most densely populated. With limited land and natural resources and the need to keep our population size manageable, Singapore is unable to be as forthcoming in accommodating refugees as other developed countries with greater physical land area and greater resources. As such, Singapore's immigration policy does not allow the entry and resettlement of refugees or accept anyone who claims to be a refugee, whether on economic or political grounds. The Republic of Singapore accordingly reserves the right to apply such legislation and conditions concerning the entry into, stay in and departure from the Republic of Singapore of those who do not or who no longer have the right under the laws of the Republic of Singapore to enter and remain in the Republic of Singapore, and to the acquisition and possession of citizenship, as it may deem necessary from time to time and in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Singapore.

466. Notwithstanding its position, Singapore had accommodated and facilitated the resettlement of the Vietnamese boat people through the setting up of a camp in 1978, i.e. the Hawkins Road Camp which was administered by UNHCR. A camp administrator took charge of the day-to-day running of the camp. Language and vocational classes conducted by wives of expatriates or voluntary teachers were arranged at the camp for the refugees. Items such as food and clothes donated by charitable organizations were distributed to the refugees. Unlike other camps in the region, the Hawkins Road Camp was not a closed camp. The refugees were allowed to leave the camp between certain hours of the day. Camp passes were issued for the purpose. Unfortunately, some misused the privilege and took up illegal employment outside the camp.

467. The camp accommodated about 30,000 refugees. They were resettled except for a residential lot of about 20 families who stayed at the camp from 1990 to 1996. This was because third countries had reneged on their unconditional written guarantees to resettle them within three months of their arrival in 1990. During their stay at the camp, seven couples married. There were 19 deliveries of babies either at government or private hospitals.

468. With the decision by UNHCR to close the camp on 30 June 1996, the remaining refugees returned by flight to Ho Chi Minh City on 27 June 1996. The refugees went home with an average of US\$ 1,852 (S\$ 3,000) in savings, with one person having saved as much as US\$ 11,111 (S\$ 18,000). As a gesture of goodwill, the Singapore Government gave them each US\$ 760.

## **2. Protection of children in armed conflicts (art. 38)**

469. Singapore is a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and has enacted the Geneva Conventions Act to implement the Geneva Conventions. The Geneva Convention (IV) relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War contains provisions for the protection of children in armed conflicts.

470. Only persons above 16 years and 6 months are subject to the Enlistment Act and in practice, only those who have reached the age of 18 years are enlisted for National Service.

## **3. Physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)**

471. The social and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims of abuse, exploitation and neglect have been incorporated under article 19 above.

472. Singapore has not been involved in an armed conflict since achieving independence. The provision concerning the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflicts has not been applicable in our context thus far.

## **B. Children in conflict with the law**

### **1. Administration of juvenile justice (art. 40)**

473. In 1994, the Government set up an Inter-Ministry Committee on Dysfunctional Families, Juvenile Delinquency and Drug Abuse to look at, among other matters, the problem of juvenile delinquency and the family in Singapore. The Committee also considered measures for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency and to enhance family life. The Government was concerned that juvenile delinquency was symptomatic of more serious family problems. The recommendations to address the concerns have since been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. In addition, an Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime (IMYC), chaired by a senior State minister, provides an ongoing focus on the issues affecting juveniles and youth. It looks at and recommends policies and programmes for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency and youth crimes.

474. Pre-emptive measures are taken to educate and inform teenagers about the serious consequences of joining gangs. Counselling is given to at-risk groups of youths who are highly likely to join gangs. Talks on repercussions of joining gangs are conducted in schools. Visits to prisons are organized for at-risk youths by the police to give them an insight into the serious consequences of taking the wrong path.

#### **Procedure and provisions for investigation of offences**

475. There is a presumption of innocence under Singapore's criminal laws. The State has to prove a case against a person (child and adult alike) charged with a criminal offence. The minimum age of criminal liability is 7 years. (Please see the section "Definition of the Child".)

476. The protection against retrospective criminal laws is found in article 11 of the Constitution and applies to all accused persons regardless of age. The Penal Code, Evidence Act and Children and Young Persons Act (C&YP Act) contain provisions relating to criminal laws and procedure applicable to trials of children and young persons. The entire thrust of the C&YP Act is to set in place a separate system for the juvenile offender and to shield the juvenile from the harsher regime for older offenders who are prosecuted in our courts. The juvenile justice system places emphasis on restorative justice, rehabilitation and reintegration of the child into the family and society. Treatment focuses on the best interest of the child and institutionalization is considered as a last resort. Juveniles below 16 years of age are not committed to prisons for adults but institutions specially set up for the reception and treatment of juvenile offenders. Such institutions come under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports. Only under special circumstances are juveniles aged 14 years and above committed to institutions administered by the Prisons Department. This applies to situations when the offence is of a very serious nature and the behaviour or character of the juvenile is so depraved that the juvenile is deemed unsuitable for treatment in a juvenile institution, i.e. where the juvenile would pose a danger to other juveniles or be disruptive to the rehabilitation of other juveniles.

477. The right to be informed of the charges against anyone (including a juvenile) is found in article 9 (3) of the Constitution. Criminal trials are provided under our judicial system with legal representation as of right. The juvenile is free to engage any counsel of his/her choice to challenge the legality of the deprivation of liberty before a court. Article 12 of the Constitution and the Criminal Procedure Code provide adequate guarantees to the ends stated in the article.

478. Under Singapore law, although an accused person may choose to remain silent, an adverse inference may be drawn. An accused person cannot be compelled to confess to his guilt and is entitled to cross-examine his witnesses and also to call witnesses to support his case. Judicial appeal and review are available to any child found guilty by a trial court. The accused is given the services of an interpreter if he/she requires one.

479. There is restriction on coverage on television and in newspapers of proceedings in the Juvenile Court which would reveal the identity of the juvenile, unless the Juvenile Court or the Minister for Community Development and Sports is of the view that such restrictions should be lifted in the interest of justice. The Court also has power to order that a case be heard in camera when the circumstances of the case so require.

480. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of juveniles are measures of last resort. When a juvenile below 16 years old is arrested for any offence, his/her parents will be informed of the arrest and requested to go to the police station. The investigation officer (IO) has to complete his preliminary investigations in four hours and release the juvenile on bail to the custody of the parents. Strict timelines for trials, usually two weeks from the time parties indicate readiness to take hearing dates, are observed. Efforts are made to find out the background of the juvenile. If he/she is a student, a school report will be sought from the school; statements from parents are also recorded to gauge his/her behaviour at home. The IO will record statements of witnesses and complainants and will find out whether he/she is a first-time offender. After the completion of investigations, the case is referred to the Attorney-General's Chambers with the police's recommendations on whether prosecution should be initiated against the juvenile. If the decision is to issue a warning to the juvenile, the Head Investigation Officer will formally warn him/her in the presence of his parents.

481. The police prosecute juveniles in court based on the severity of the offence. If the decision is made to charge him/her, he/she will appear in the Juvenile Court should he/she be under 16 years of age on the date of the court appearance. If above 16 years of age, he/she will appear in the subordinate courts. In the event of a conviction, the court will sentence the juvenile within the limits of the law.

### **Diversionsary measures for treatment of juvenile offenders**

482. Diversionsary measures are available to the police and the Attorney-General's Chambers for young offenders who they intend to let off with a caution. Examples are the Guidance Programme (GP) and the Streetwise Programme.

**Guidance Programme (GP)**

483. The Guidance Programme (GP) is a six-month counselling and rehabilitation programme for juveniles who are let off with a police caution instead of being charged in court for offences committed. Juveniles are helped to recognize the seriousness and consequences of their acts, and to acquire life skills such as self-control, handling of peer pressure and conflict resolution. Parents of these juveniles are guided with respect to necessary skills and knowledge to be more effective in the parenting and supervision of their children. The GP comprises counselling, group sessions and support groups for the juvenile, the parents and other family members. Other activities such as recreational and community service activities are also provided.

**Streetwise Programme (SWP)**

484. The Streetwise Programme (SWP) is a developmental programme aimed at changing the behaviour of youths who have unwittingly drifted into gangs. It is a six-month structured programme that includes elements of counselling, family conferencing, peer support, recreation and academic activities. The programme aims to help youth turn over a new leaf and gain a fresh start in life. Main sources of referrals for the SWP include police referrals for non-offenders and referrals from the court. It is part of the community-based treatment programme for youths placed on probation for committing gang-related offences. It is also targeted at youths who are looking for help to get out of gangs.

**Treatment of juvenile offenders charged in court**

485. Where a juvenile is prosecuted and convicted in court, there is a wide variety of community-based and residential orders which the court may make, e.g. supervision, probation, care of a “fit person”,<sup>23</sup> detention centres, approved schools, weekend detention, community service order and reformatory training centres. The court may also undertake some pre-court measures such as family conferencing. Family conferencing is a process which provides an opportunity for the juvenile to understand the seriousness of the offending behaviour, to accept responsibility for the offending behaviour, to address the issue of family and community accountability, to contribute to the cautioning process if possible, and to make possible reparation compensation to the victim.

486. The philosophy underlying the treatment of juveniles is that all community-based options have to be considered. Institutionalization should be the last resort. When juveniles are committed to institutions for rehabilitation, the ultimate aim of the institutional programme is to reintegrate them into society. This is achieved through the inculcation of discipline, desirable social values, education and marketable skills. Each juvenile is viewed as unique. Individual treatment plans are formulated and implemented to address the potential for the rehabilitation of each resident.

487. Family and community involvement are essential components of the rehabilitation process and the reintegration of children into society. Parents participate in orientation programmes, counselling sessions, workshops, group sessions and parent-support groups,



regardless of whether the juvenile is placed in a community-based or residential programme. The Government works closely with civic and grass-roots organizations, voluntary welfare organizations, individual volunteers, schools and employers to develop a network of services to supplement and support the rehabilitation process and to provide a continuum of services and programmes.

## **2. Protection against torture and related ill-treatment or punishment; deprivation of liberty (art. 37 (b), (c) and (d))**

488. This provision imposes an obligation on States parties to protect all children from any form of physical harm, whether in the form of treatment or punishment. Capital punishment or life imprisonment without release is prohibited for those aged 18 years and below. Singapore's domestic laws, i.e. the Penal Code, the C&YP Act and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), comply fully with the obligation. The C&YP Act contains comprehensive provisions to protect the overall well-being of the child as well as against trafficking in children. The CPC provides that no person of 18 years and below is liable to be punished with the capital penalty while those between the ages of 7 and 16 years can only be caned with a lighter rod. The Penal Code also states that no act of a child below 7 years of age is an offence. Our penal laws recognize the importance of rehabilitation of offenders. Hence, remission of sentences, including life sentences leading to early release from prison, is possible for all offenders. While the Juvenile Court has powers to order detention in approved schools or approved homes for fixed periods for juveniles, the Minister is empowered under the C&YP Act to order the early release of children from such detention if there are reasons to warrant the early release.

489. As mentioned above under article 37 (a), persons who are below the age of 18 years at the time of commission of a serious offence can be detained during the President's pleasure in lieu of the death penalty. There is no legal minimum or maximum period of detention. The cases of those detained are reviewed every four years and a report is forwarded to the Minister for Home Affairs and the President. After the tenth year of detention, the review is carried out annually. Recommendations for release will be made by the Prisons Department and forwarded to the Minister. The prisoner will be released upon an order from the President.

490. Article 9 (1) of our Constitution states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law. Article 9 (2) states that where a complaint is made to the High Court that a person is being unlawfully detained, the Court shall order him/her to be produced before the Court and released, unless the detention is lawful. These are safeguards in our Constitution against unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Article 9 (3) of the Constitution also provides that a person arrested should be informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for arrest and allowed to consult a legal practitioner of choice. The person arrested has to be produced before a magistrate within 48 hours.

491. Arrested persons below 16 years of age have to be brought before a Juvenile Court. Where this is not possible, the arresting officer shall bring the person before a magistrate without unnecessary delay. The magistrate shall release that person on a bond unless the charge is one which can only be tried by the High Court, or it is necessary to remove the person from association with undesirable people, or the ends of justice would be defeated by the person's release. These provisions in the C&YP Act are in line with article 37 (b).

492. It must be noted that not all persons arrested for committing offences are eventually charged in court. In many cases, the police, at the direction of the Attorney-General's Chambers, may administer a stern warning to juveniles or minors instead of prosecuting them. The police may place a juvenile in the Guidance Programme instead of prosecuting the juvenile. Warning and placement in the Guidance Programme is done on a case-by-case basis.

493. The 1997 and 1998 statistics on arrests of juveniles and those between 16 and 19 years showed that a sizeable number of juveniles were involved in serious offences such as outraging modesty and rioting (see tables below).

**Table 27. No. of juveniles (7-15 years) arrested, charged and convicted in court for seizable offences in 1997 and 1998**

Year	Arrested	Charged	Convicted	Pending
1997	2 147	213	87	123
1998	2 242	183	11	172

**Table 28. No. of persons aged 16-19 years arrested, charged and convicted in court for seizable offences in 1997 and 1998**

Year	Arrested	Charged	Convicted	Pending
1997	2 265	617	237	350
1998	2 154	597	50	545

494. The C&YP Act provides a wide array of sentencing options for the Juvenile Court. The C&YP Act states that a "child" shall not be imprisoned and that a young person shall not be imprisoned for any offence unless the Court certifies that he/she is of so unruly a character that he/she cannot be detained in a place of detention or an approved school which are facilities for the treatment of juvenile offenders who are below 16 years of age at time of committal. Detention is imposed only as a last resort and for the shortest period of time to enable rehabilitation. The Act also provides that children and young persons being detained, conveyed to a court or awaiting trial shall not associate with adult offenders. A panel of advisers comprising prominent individuals appointed by the President advises the Juvenile Court magistrate on treatment of juveniles brought before the Juvenile Court.

495. Child offenders who are detained have the right to legal and other appropriate assistance and to challenge their detention in the High Court. Such actions are always heard speedily. There is no criminal legal aid scheme provided by the State. The only free criminal legal aid is provided by the Singapore Law Society under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme.

496. A young offender who attains the age of 16 by the time the case comes up for hearing in the Juvenile Court may be referred to a District Court to be considered for reformatory training. The District Court may either sentence him/her to reformatory training or deal with him/her in a manner similar to that adopted by the Juvenile Court.

497. Detention under the Misuse of Drugs Act, Internal Security Act and Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act is done in accordance with the law. Singapore has made a declaration that article 37 does not prohibit the application of any prevailing measures prescribed by law for maintaining law and order or measures and restrictions which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in the interests of national security, public safety and public order (see paragraph 2 of the Instrument of Accession). This declaration sets out Singapore's position in relation to the issue of solitary confinement in detention centres and prisons as well as corporal punishment in juvenile homes, prisons and drug rehabilitation centres.

### **Institutions for children and young persons who are offenders**

498. If institutionalization is deemed necessary by the court, an offender below the age of 16 years is generally committed into institutions for children and young persons unless the offence committed is of a very serious nature and the behaviour of the juvenile is so depraved that he/she is deemed unsuitable for treatment in a juvenile institution. These institutions are administered either by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) for juveniles who need a more structured environment for their rehabilitation, or by voluntary welfare organizations for juveniles who have committed milder offences and are less problematic in their behaviour. Institutionalization is considered only as a last resort for juvenile offenders and is invoked only when community-based facilities are deemed unsuitable. Committal into these institutions is for either two or three years.

499. The emphasis of programmes in these institutions is on rehabilitation, restorative justice, and the best interest of the juveniles. Programmes include education, vocational training, group sessions, individual counselling, moral and religious education and recreational and sports activities. Individual needs of the juveniles are addressed to prepare for their eventual reintegration into society and with a view to inculcating discipline, desirable social skills and values, and life skills. The treatment process does not concentrate on juveniles alone, but involves parents and significant family members at every stage of the rehabilitation process. The support and involvement of schools, community, civic and social groups and individuals are also enlisted. Parents, siblings and significant relatives are encouraged to visit the juveniles, either weekly or fortnightly, depending on the institution. These juveniles are also allowed to go on home leave after some months of stay subject to good behaviour. The frequency of home leave (once a month, once a fortnight, weekly) depends on the progress made by the juveniles.

500. Corporal punishment is allowed in these juvenile institutions. However, the administration of corporal punishment is guided by Regulations under the C&YP Act. Only the Superintendent or, in his absence, an authorized person can administer corporal punishment. Solitary confinement is only for very unruly and difficult residents and is also guided by the Regulations of the C&YP Act. Punishment of residents is subject to several conditions: the separated resident must not be below 12 years old; the confinement room must be bright, airy and kept lighted after dark; the separated resident must be able to communicate with staff of the school or home during separation; and the resident must not be separated for more than 24 hours except with prior approval of the Director. A Board of Visitors comprising prominent members

of the public is appointed by the Minister for Community Development and Sports under the C&YP Act. The Board ensures that standards are maintained and the well-being of the children are catered to in the approved schools, approved homes, places of detention, places of safety and remand facilities for children. Members of the Board of Visitors make regular unannounced visits to these institutions to check on them.

501. All cases of juvenile offenders who have completed one year of stay in these homes are reviewed by an Advisory Board.<sup>24</sup> If the progress of a juvenile is satisfactory, the juvenile can be considered for early release on licence and placed under the care of an aftercare officer for the remaining portion of the detention order. The aim is to help juveniles return to their families and society at the first appropriate opportunity after 12 months of stay. The table below shows a breakdown in the admissions to juvenile homes by gender and type of offence.

**Table 29. No. of admissions to homes administered by MCDS by gender and case type**

Offence	Males					Females				
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Theft/stolen property	94	112	97	190	105	20	11	23	23	24
Theft of motor vehicles	19	11	12	-	-	-	-	3	-	0
Housebreaking	13	20	17	18	10	-	1	0	1	1
Affray/causing hurt	15	14	6	9	6	2	3	1	3	5
Robbery/extortion	26	21	30	33	7	10	3	9	5	1
Rioting	15	35	14	32	7	4	10	3	3	4
Unlawful assembly	20	53	34	29	9	1	3	5	1	0
Possession of offensive weapons	3	16	10	11	2	-	-	0	1	0
Beyond parental control	11	18	14	18	11	30	39	42	26	30
Child protection order	2	-	2	-	1	2	-	6	5	2
Women's Charter	-	-	-	-	-	1	8	5	6	10
Smoking/possession of tobacco products	2	2	17	19	11	1	-	0	2	0
Others	26	28	18	39	35	2	2	9	5	10
Outrage against modesty/carnal connection	3	7	7	1	12	-	-	0	0	-
Culpable homicide	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Drugs	5	8	8	5	3	3	11	4	3	5
Mischief/illegal hawking	-	-	16	14	7	-	-	0	-	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>92</b>

### **Institutions for those above 16 years and difficult juveniles**

502. Singapore has a medium-security institution for the rehabilitation of offenders aged between the ages of 16 and 21. This is the Reformative Training Centre (RTC) which comes under the purview of the Prisons Department. Those between 16 years and below 21 years may be ordered by the court to undergo reformative training for up to four years in the RTC in lieu of an imprisonment term upon conviction of a criminal offence, if the court feels that the period of reformative training will contribute to rehabilitation. A reformative trainee who has shown good progress and conduct can be released after serving a minimum period of 18 months. The maximum period of detention is 36 months. Upon release, the offender is also placed under the supervision of an aftercare officer until the expiration of 48 months from the date of conviction. The rules relating to the release and supervision of reformative trainees are listed in the Criminal Procedure Code. The treatment and rehabilitation programme are governed by the Prison Standing Orders.

503. An offender who is above 14 years but below 16 years and has already been committed to a juvenile institution but is subsequently found to be disruptive and a danger to other juveniles may be ordered by the Juvenile Court to be detained at the RTC.

504. Reformative trainees are allowed to receive visits from their family and friends once every fortnight. Like all institutions under the administration of the Prisons Department, the conditions within the RTC are monitored through:

(a) Yearly visit by the Director of Prisons. The Director's visit is marked by an inspection of the institution to ensure that it is properly administered by the Superintendent. The reformative trainees are free to see the Director on his rounds of the institution to make requests or air their grievances;

(b) Visits by visiting justices. Visiting justices are prominent citizens appointed by the Minister of Home Affairs to function as an independent authority to check on the management of penal facilities, including the RTC. Such inspection visits are unannounced and conducted at the discretion of the individual visiting justice. A visiting justice has access to all parts of the institution and all reformative trainees. These reformative trainees can freely approach the visiting justice and bring up any complaints or requests to be looked into. The complaints/requests made by the reformative trainees are to be entered into an official register for onward transmission to the Director of Prisons and the Minister for Home Affairs;

(c) Inspection of prisons by Prisons Headquarters. The Prisons Headquarters conducts surprise inspections of the institution to ascertain whether existing prison procedures and regulations are adhered to. These inspections are carried out by the Prison Staff Inspectorate (PSI), which reports directly to the Director of Prisons.

505. Reformative trainees also have opportunities to air their grievances:

(a) The Superintendent makes daily inspection rounds of the institution and the inmates are able to bring up any grievance or request to his attention;

(b) Reformative trainees are allowed to receive regular visits from family members and friends. Trainees can use the opportunity to make their grievances known to them. They can enlist the services of lawyers to enquire into allegations of ill-treatment by prison staff, write to the Director of Prisons or the Superintendent, or register their complaints through representation to members of Parliament. The allegations will be duly looked into and an official reply shall be given to the complainants;

(c) The inmates are also free to complain to the visiting justices whenever they make their rounds of the institution. All complaints made to them are duly investigated.

506. The RTC has facilities for teaching and vocational training. All reformative trainees are required to undergo a broad-based vocation training that gives them basic competency in two technical subjects (electrical wiring and basic computer skills). They may also sit for courses to improve their educational qualification. Primary and secondary school subjects are taught by trained teachers seconded from the Ministry of Education. Education, welfare, skills training, religion and recreation form the key elements of the physical and psychological recovery efforts undertaken at the RTC. Individual and group counselling are conducted by trained prison officers. There are resident counsellors who work with the inmates on a daily basis. There is a dispensary at the institution to treat minor medical problems on a daily basis. Serious medical cases are referred to hospitals for specialist medical treatment.

507. Existing prison rules and regulations cater to the mental and physical well-being of the young offenders. The rehabilitation programmes for such offenders are consistent with the provisions laid out in the Convention and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

### **C. Children in situations of exploitation, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration**

#### **1. Economic exploitation of children, including child labour (art. 32)**

508. Singapore is a party to the ILO Minimum Age (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 5), the Minimum Age (Sea) Convention (No. 7) and the Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stokers) Convention (No. 15). Singapore's labour legislation accords special protection to persons below the age of 16 years. Children below the age of 12 years are prohibited from being employed while those between the ages of 12 and 16 years may be employed subject to employers' compliance with the safeguards in the labour legislation. These safeguards pertain to the type of work allowed and the hours of work.

509. To ensure that these provisions are adhered to, the Employment Act spells out penalties for both the employers who have contravened the law and parents or guardians who condone such action. Upon conviction, a person shall be liable to a fine not exceeding S\$ 2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to both. The minimum terms and conditions and safeguards in employment are stipulated in the Employment Act and the Safety and Health Regulations. The employment, safety and health legislations are strictly enforced. Appropriate penalties are imposed on employers who violate these regulations.

510. Singapore employment legislation grants protection to children up to the age of 16 which may not be in line with the Convention which envisages protection granted to children up to the age of 18 years. Singapore has entered a reservation on this article, stating that “the employment legislation of the Republic of Singapore prohibits the employment of children below 12 years old and gives special protection to working children between the ages of 12 years and below the age of 16 years. The Republic of Singapore reserves the right to apply article 32 subject to such employment legislation”. The current minimum age restriction on the employment of children and young persons in Singapore was set based on the duration of primary and secondary education in Singapore. Students complete their secondary education usually at 16 years. Those who do not wish to pursue further studies may thus join the labour force at 16 years. In practice, most youths between the ages of 16 to 18 years are either pursuing higher education or vocational training in technical institutes. Notwithstanding this, our employment legislation does provide for the protection of the child in respect of the maximum number of hours that he/she may work, working hours and types of work. The types of employment Singaporean children would likely be engaged in would be fast-food restaurants, clerical or other support services in offices or sales in department stores during the school holidays.

511. Although it is rare to find children working in “sweat shops” or unregulated industries in Singapore, there has been an increase in the number of children who have been caught selling pirated CDs. Investigations have shown that these children often are made use of by adults. Hence, public education messages have been sent to the public and children in schools to protect them from exploitation. This situation is also being closely monitored by the police.

## **2. Drug abuse (art. 33)**

512. Singapore prohibits the illicit use, production and trafficking of narcotics. The Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) and the Drug Trafficking (Confiscation of Benefits) Act (DTA) administered by the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) serve this purpose. The measures taken are for the protection of the public, not just children. Singapore is a party to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971).

513. The MDA targets the supply and demand side of drug trafficking and abuse via arrest and prosecution. It provides for punishments such as fines, imprisonment, caning and death sentences for offences ranging from consumption to possession, trafficking, importation and exportation of controlled drugs. By the same token, the DTA empowers authorities to trace, freeze and forfeit assets of drug traffickers and render the laundering of drug proceeds an offence. This is to add a further disincentive to drug traffickers who take the risk of trafficking drugs despite Singapore’s tough laws and severe penalties.

514. The number of people below the age of 20 years arrested in 1996 for drug addiction is low and makes up only 6.1 per cent (352 addicts) of the addict population in Singapore. This percentage has been decreasing steadily since 1993, which saw the peak at 11.6 per cent (679 addicts). From 1995 to 1996, though, there has been a 0.4 per cent rise in the number of addicts arrested. This increase is probably due to the popularity of psychotropic drugs, namely Ecstasy, among our youth.

**Community involvement**

515. The National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) was formed in January 1995 to advise the Minister for Home Affairs on the policies and measures necessary to curb drug abuse in Singapore. Its goal is also to mobilize and sustain public support for its anti-drug programmes. NCADA members are prominent individuals from the business sector and the community appointed by the Minister for Home Affairs for a period of two years at a time.

516. NCADA believes that in view of the high individual, social and economic costs of drug addiction, a fundamental component of its efforts should be directed towards the prevention of drug abuse, along with the creation of strong public awareness and community support for the various anti-drug programmes. NCADA harnesses greater community involvement in its anti-drug cause and works closely with both the community and relevant government agencies such as the CNB, the Prisons Department and the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprise (SCORE). Their activities and programmes are aimed at reinforcing the anti-drug message to high-risk individuals and helping ex-addicts in their rehabilitation. The Council also emphasizes the important role that the community plays in discouraging illicit drug use. Its long-term strategy is to continue to create a strong, cohesive social network to support the Government's anti-drug measures and programmes. It has so far received strong support for its work from the many voluntary welfare organizations, community groups and the private sector. It plans to continue with its multi-pronged approach, but with greater emphasis on prevention.

**Preventive drug education**

517. In addition to NCADA's public education efforts, the Preventive Education Unit (PEU) set up within the CNB in 1994 undertakes preventive education and coordinates the efforts of preventive drug education to contain Singapore's drug problem. The PDE programmes complement the enforcement action and rehabilitation to stamp out the drug menace. PDE educates students, high-risk youth and young adults about drug abuse. It is thus hoped that widespread PDE will lead to the development of an adversarial attitude towards illicit drug use. PDE focuses on schools and organizes visits to drug rehabilitation centres, talks by CNB officers during school assemblies, adventure learning camps, anti-drug abuse weeks and PDE seminars for teachers and student leaders.

**Enforcement**

518. The self-containment of Singapore's drug situation is due to the vigorous and regular enforcement efforts undertaken by CNB to cripple drug trafficking syndicates to curb the demand for contraband drugs. In recent years CNB has intensified its efforts to identify members of drug trafficking syndicates for arrest and prosecution. With traffickers out of the way, addicts are denied drug sources at street level. CNB arrests not only the key leaders, but simultaneously all clients and associates as well. The table below illustrates the number of arrests made for prosecution offences.



**Table 30. Arrests for prosecutions (1996-1998)**

	1996	1997	1998
Prosecutions	2 119	1 724	1 718

### **3. Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (art. 34)**

519. Singapore does not have laws which permit the prosecution of Singaporeans in Singapore for acts of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation committed overseas. However, there are various provisions which provide penalties for offences committed within Singapore. Sections 6 and 11 of the C&YP Act provide penalties for sexual exploitation of children and young persons in Singapore. Section 140 of the Women's Charter provides penalties for a comprehensive list of offences against females, including prostitution of female children in Singapore. Section 376 of the Penal Code provides penalties for sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of 14 irrespective of consent. Section 376 A and 376 B of the Penal Code provide penalties for incest and aggravated penalties for incest with a girl under 14. From 1994 to June 1999, there were two cases of sexual exploitation (one in 1994 and the other in 1995).

520. Singapore is a party to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and the Final Protocol (1950).

521. In 1992, the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations (SCWO), the umbrella body for women's organizations, made a proposal to standardize and enhance police procedures in the management of rape cases. As a result, a Rape Management Committee was set up under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) with representatives from SCWO. A Rape Investigation Squad was also launched on 1 October 1997, which centralized investigations of offences of such nature under the Criminal Investigation Department instead of the Police Land Divisions. The Squad comprises a 15-member team of 10 male and 5 female police officers who investigate cases of rape, incest, carnal connection and unnatural offences. These officers are specially identified and undergo a training programme provided by psychologists and legal officers. A trained female officer will see to the needs of the female victim throughout the investigation process. Victims are provided with counselling and emotional support to reduce their trauma.

#### **Children and young persons taking part in public entertainment**

522. Section 11 of the C&YP Act restricts children and young people from taking part in any form of public entertainment of an immoral nature which is dangerous to the life or prejudicial to the health, physical fitness and kind treatment of the child or young person, or without the consent of his/her parents or guardian. Any person guilty of an offence is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding S\$ 1,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, or to both. If the person is a licence holder under the Public Entertainment Act, the court may also order the cancellation of the licence or its suspension for such period as the court may think fit.

### **Offences relating to prostitution**

523. The Women's Charter has provisions to deal with offences relating to prostitution:

(a) Section 140 of the Women's Charter makes it an offence for any person to procure, intimidate, harbour or detain any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or for carnal connection, except by way of marriage, either within or outside Singapore. The offender is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding S\$ 10,000;

(b) Sections 143 and 144 provide that any person who is the owner or occupier of any premises and who permits a girl under the age of 16 to use the premises for intercourse or permits a mental defective to use the premises for intercourse shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding S\$ 2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or both; and

(c) Section 145 provides that any person who causes or encourages the prostitution of, intercourse with, or indecent assault on, a girl under the age of 16 years shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding S\$ 2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years.

### **General comments**

524. Singapore has few reported cases of the sexual exploitation of children. The Government is confident that the harsh penalties will act as deterrents to potential abusers and will continue to work with the relevant professionals and agencies in identifying possible cases of sexual exploitation.

## **4. Other forms of exploitation (art. 36)**

525. Article 36 requires the State to protect the child against all forms of exploitation prejudicial to the child's welfare. Singapore views its policies and legislations as effective in protecting our children from exploitation. The cases of exploitation are very few in number. Nevertheless, the Government reviews the various legislation periodically for their relevance and to safeguard the best interests of the children and residents of Singapore.

526. Slavery and forced labour are prohibited under our Constitution. Singapore is a party to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children (1921) and the 1947 Protocol, Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and Final Protocol (1950), the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (1904), the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade (1910) and the 1949 Protocol, Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) and the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).

## **5. Sale, trafficking and abduction (art. 35)**

### **Trafficking in children**

527. Singapore does not tolerate offences related to trafficking of children. Under section 12 of the Children and Young Persons Act, any person found guilty of an offence involving the unlawful transfer of possession, custody or control of a child shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding four years.

528. Section 141 of the Women's Charter states that any person who buys, sells, procures, traffics in, or brings into or takes out of Singapore for the purpose of such traffic, and whether or not for the purpose of present or subsequent prostitution, any woman or girl, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding S\$ 10,000.

529. Besides these laws, there are programmes and services available to children who are victims of trafficking. There are agencies that provide medical services, counselling, psychological and psychiatric services and residential care for children. These services and programmes are provided by governmental and non-government agencies.

### **Abduction**

530. The Women's Charter has provisions to protect children from being removed unlawfully from Singapore. The provisions stipulate that:

- (a) A child under custody order cannot be taken out of Singapore except with the written consent of both parents or the leave of the court;
- (b) A person given the custody of a child or who has the written consent of the person given custody is, however, not prevented from taking the child out of Singapore for a period of less than a month; and
- (c) Contravention is an offence which is subject to a fine of up to S\$ 5,000 or imprisonment up to one year, or both.

### **D. Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group (art. 30)**

531. The Constitution states (in article 152) that it shall be the responsibility of the Government constantly to care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore. The Government shall exercise its functions in a manner so as to recognize the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore. Accordingly, it shall be the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.

532. Singapore has a community of self-help organizations which cater to the Malay-Muslim, Indian, Chinese and Eurasian ethnic groups. These organizations are MENDAKI, the Singapore Indian Development Association, the Chinese Development Assistance Council and the Eurasian Association. They are financially supported by the Government. The objective of these organizations is to help the less advantaged members in their respective community adapt to the rapid economic and social changes. They aim to do this through educational and training programmes. An emphasis is placed on working with children and young people through ethnically sensitive programmes for teaching and enrichment.

533. The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) - the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore - is the supreme Islamic religious authority in Singapore. Established in 1968 to advise the Government on Islamic matters, MUIS looks after the religious, social and welfare needs of Muslims in Singapore. Its functions and responsibilities are set out in the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). To help build strong and stable families, a new Family Development Department in MUIS was officially launched in April 1998. One of its first tasks was to conduct nationwide research involving 1,000 individuals and 30 organizations to survey the needs of the Muslim community.

534. The Government recognizes that one important aspect of social cohesion for a multiracial and multicultural nation like Singapore is racial and religious harmony. While Singaporeans of all communities now adopt a Singaporean identity, the Government encourages the desire of each community to preserve its own distinctiveness in terms of its vibrant facets of language, religion and culture. Singapore has enjoyed racial harmony for a generation. However, the Government still works continually to build mutual understanding and respect among the communities.

535. Singapore continues to explore its multicultural heritage through the preservation and interpretation of the nation's history and material culture in the context of its multicultural origins. This includes promoting awareness of the ancestral cultures of all citizens through publications and exhibitions. To bring about a greater understanding of and appreciation for the many cultures that make up Singapore, our museums have staged several exhibitions such as the following:

Culture on the Fringes: The Orang Asli Collection (1994)

Traditional Weddings (1995)

Singapore Malays - A social history (1996)

Rumah Baba - Life in a Peranakan House (1997)

Ramayana: A living tradition (1997)

Harmony of letters: Islamic Calligraphy (1998)

Highlanders, Islanders and Headhunters (1998)

The Jewish Community of Singapore (1999)

Tamil Language and its history in Singapore (2000).

536. The Housing Development Board (HDB) ensures that sites within HDB estates are reserved for various religious groups for their religious buildings. Vacant land within HDB estates is also let out to grass-roots organizations at nominal fees for recreational projects for children. For example, street soccer pitches, multi-purpose hard courts and children's playgrounds, etc., are some of the common items put up by the grass-roots organizations to cater to the needs of children of all races.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Conversion rate used: S\$ 1.62 = US\$ 1.

<sup>2</sup> This is the average number of children that would be born per female, if all females lived to the end of their childbearing years and bore children according to a given set of age-specific fertility rates. It is derived by aggregating the age-specific fertility rates of females in each of the reproductive ages for a specific year. It refers to the number of births by mothers of a specific age group during a given year, per thousand females in that age group.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the number of births by mothers of a specific age group during a given year, per thousand females in that age group.

<sup>4</sup> Literacy is defined as a person's ability to read with understanding a newspaper in the language specified.

<sup>5</sup> Singapore implemented a vehicle quota system on 1 May 1990 to regulate the growth of the vehicle population in Singapore. Under the system, the number of vehicles allowed for registration is predetermined annually, taking into account the prevailing traffic conditions and the number of cars taken off the road permanently, whilst the market conditions determine the price of owning a vehicle. To register for a new vehicle, a resident of Singapore needs to bid for a COE.

<sup>6</sup> Section 92 of the Women's Charter defines a "child of the marriage" to mean "any child of the husband and wife, and includes any adopted child and any other child (whether or not a child of the husband or of the wife) who was a member of the family of the husband and wife at the time when they ceased to live together or at any time immediately preceding the institution of the proceedings, whichever first occurred; and for the purposes of this definition, the parties to a purported marriage that is void shall be deemed to be husband and wife".

<sup>7</sup> The Guidance Programme is a diversionary measure implemented by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports in October 1997. It is a six-month counselling and rehabilitative programme aimed at giving juveniles a second chance and helping juveniles steer

away from crime. The Programme is run by social workers of voluntary welfare organizations appointed by the Ministry. Juveniles are let off with a stern warning if they complete the Programme successfully in lieu of court prosecution for the offences committed. This Programme was implemented to prevent recidivism as police statistics showed that one in three children caught by the police for offences and let off with a warning reoffend. The recidivism rate for children who have completed the Guidance Programme is only 4 per cent.

<sup>8</sup> The Evaluation Instrument for childcare centres was developed in 1990 with the assistance of experts recruited under UNDP.

<sup>9</sup> The HDB is the public housing authority in Singapore.

<sup>10</sup> Section 310 of the Penal Code provides that a mother who causes the death of her child who is below 12 months of age, because she is of unsound mind and has not recovered fully from childbirth, will not be found guilty of murder.

<sup>11</sup> Under the Women's Charter, a "child" is defined as a person below 21 years.

<sup>12</sup> Care facilities for children below 7 years of age.

<sup>13</sup> Care facilities for school-going children up to the age of 14 years.

<sup>14</sup> Rule 2 of the Women's Charter (Parenting Plan) Rules defines this as a child who is below the age of 21 years, or above the age of 21 but suffers from mental or physical disability; is or will be serving full-time national service; or is or will be receiving instruction at an education establishment or undergoing training for a trade, profession or vocation, whether or not in gainful employment.

<sup>15</sup> Section 5 (c) of the Adoption Act states that the court, before making an adoption order, shall be satisfied that the applicant has not received or agreed to receive, and that no person has made or given, or agreed to make or give to the applicant, any payment or other reward in consideration of the adoption except such as the court may sanction.

<sup>16</sup> Details on training are mentioned later in this section.

<sup>17</sup> ARF is a tax equivalent to 140 per cent of a car's open market value.

<sup>18</sup> The Vehicle Quota System was implemented on 1 May 1990 to regulate the growth of the vehicle population in Singapore. Under this system, the number of new vehicles allowed for registration is predetermined annually, taking into account the prevailing traffic conditions and the number of vehicles taken off the roads permanently, whilst the market determines the price of owning a vehicle. To register for a new vehicle, a resident of Singapore needs to bid for a COE.

<sup>19</sup> Public Assistance is meant to assist Singapore citizens who, due to age, illness, disability or unfavourable family circumstances, are unable to work and have no means of subsistence and no one to depend on.

<sup>20</sup> CDC is a local administration set up to better serve Singaporeans. Currently, the island of Singapore is divided into five CDCs.

<sup>21</sup> This Committee was chaired by the Senior Minister of State for Education, Dr. Aline Wong, and comprised of senior officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Institute of Education (NIE), a national training institute for trainee teachers.

<sup>22</sup> The National Arts Council (NAC) was established in 1991 to spearhead the development of the arts. Its mission is to help nurture the arts and develop Singapore into a vibrant global city for the arts. NAC promotes the appreciation and practice of the arts, nurtures artistic talent, provides arts facilities, promotes Singaporean arts overseas and brings international talents and events into Singapore.

<sup>23</sup> Under the Children and Young Persons Act, a “fit person” is a person whom the court or the Protector thinks is competent to provide care, protection and supervision of a child or young person.

<sup>24</sup> Also mentioned above in “Family Environment and Alternative Care”.

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