



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Eighty-first session

### Summary record of the 2378th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 16 May 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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*Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore*

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

**Consideration of reports of States parties** (*continued*)

*Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore (CRC/C/SGP/4-5; CRC/C/SGP/Q/4-5 and CRC/C/SGP/Q/4-5/Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Singapore took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore), introducing the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore (CRC/C/SGP/4-5), said that implementation of the Convention was coordinated by the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which brought together various agencies and non-government parties in a whole-of-society effort to ensure children's rights.
3. His Government strove to ensure that every child had a good start in life and that no child was disadvantaged because of the circumstances of his or her birth. It believed in education as a key social enabler. No children would be denied an education because they could not afford it; primary education was free and children from low-income families received financial assistance from the State. Literacy rates were high, with almost 97 per cent of primary schoolchildren progressing to post-secondary education. Investment in the preschool sector was set to quadruple between 2012 and 2023, and the number of full-day preschool places to more than double. It was hoped that at least two out of three children would have access to affordable, quality State-funded preschools. Efforts were being made to reduce school stress for children, notably by changing the primary school grading system and reducing the number of examinations in primary and secondary schools.
4. Support for parents was provided under schemes such as the Child Development Account, parental leave arrangements and family-friendly work practices. Information and resources to help parents with newborns and young children were available through the Baby Bonus Parenting Resources portal. Low-income families and their children could obtain financial assistance to cover basic living needs from the Community Care (ComCare) assistance scheme. In 2017 some 131 million Singapore dollars (S\$) had been disbursed to around 30,000 households, comprising around 70,000 individuals. As to children with special developmental or educational needs, a 30 per cent increase in investment was planned to help make early intervention programmes more affordable and better suited to such children's varied needs. The Compulsory Education Act had been extended to enable children with moderate to severe special education needs to attend regular programmes in the national schools.
5. The Children and Young Persons Act was being reviewed with a view to ensuring better care, protection and rehabilitation for vulnerable children and young people. Citizens had been consulted on the proposed amendments, which were expected to be introduced in Parliament towards the end of the year. One amendment would raise the upper age defining a child from 16 to 18, in conformity with the Convention definition. Other changes would improve the care and protection of children and young persons unable to reside safely with their families and emphasize community-based care and the responsibility of families to guide children and resolve conflicts where children and young persons were beyond parental control.
6. The Penal Code had recently been amended to protect children under 18 from physical and sexual offences, including by doubling the penalties for offences against children. In addition, new offences relating to fatal child abuse and sexual abuse and exploitation of a child had been introduced. The minimum age of criminal responsibility was to be raised from 7 to 10 years of age.
7. He wished to express his Government's gratitude to Singaporean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their work in advocacy and, partly in partnership with State agencies, their provision of accessible and people-centred social services. In the area of child protection, particularly, the Child Protective Service worked with NGOs to ensure that children were kept safe in their families, provided with adequate support and removed only as a last resort.

8. **Ms. Winter** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the State party had a tendency, in its submissions, to justify decisions not to take account of the Committee's views by stating that the current arrangements had "worked well for us". She would like to know who "we" referred to. If it meant society at large, it was important to remember that children were a special part of society and that their needs were not necessarily the same as those of adults. It might be that a given policy deserved review in order to take better account of children's interests. The State party had indicated its intention to maintain all its numerous reservations and declarations in respect of the Convention, but she wondered if all of them were really still necessary. Might the State party be willing to reconsider its position?

9. It was her understanding that parents received extensive financial support from the State in the areas of children's health, education and other basic needs, but only for the first and second child; if they had a third child all benefits were discontinued. She would like to know if that was indeed the case. The State clearly spent a great deal of money on children. However, the budget documentation showed only headings for general sectors and appeared to contain no breakdown of the expenditure specifically for children. She would have expected a State with the resources of Singapore to be able to produce a budget with a children's rights perspective.

10. In its report and written replies to the list of issues ([CRC/C/SGP/Q/4-5/Add.1](#)), the State party maintained that its human rights monitoring mechanisms were adequate without the application of the Paris Principles. She would like to know how the State party could guarantee the objectivity and independence of those mechanisms if they were not governed by the Paris Principles. As to cooperation with civil society organizations, she would like to know to what extent the Government worked with children and groups of children as such. Noting that the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention was not the sole coordinator in the area of children's rights, she suggested that a single monitoring body would have a stronger mandate for overall supervision.

11. In the area of corporate social responsibility, it appeared that economic exploitation of children was not a problem in the State party, but that was not the sole area of responsibility for businesses. She would like to know whether it was possible under Singaporean law to hold businesses, especially international companies, accountable for any impact on the environment that adversely affected children. How did companies report on any action they might have taken to protect the environment for the sake of children's health?

12. Noting that protection for children had been extended to the age of 18, she asked whether that applied in all areas or whether there were still gaps in protection. An exception appeared to be made in respect of marriage in the Islamic community, for example. She was sure the delegation was aware of the importance of having mothers who were healthy, strong young women of at least 18 years of age, not 16- or 17-year-olds, whose bodies and minds had still not fully developed. It was a point the State party might wish to review.

13. She would like to know whether it was now possible for all Singaporean mothers to transmit their citizenship to their children or if there were still exceptions. She wondered how many stateless children there were in the State party and what the Government planned to do for them.

14. With regard to freedom of expression and association, the Committee had received information indicating that children were afraid of voicing criticisms or opinions openly for fear of defamation lawsuits. Apparently, there was only one place where people could speak out openly, namely Hong Lim Park; otherwise special police permission was required for public gatherings or expressions of opinion. She wondered whether the delegation believed that was good for the development of children's active participation in society later on.

15. She understood that the Internet Code of Practice allowed service providers to report unsuitable content. She would like to know whether that happened in practice and if so, how many times such content had been reported.

16. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** (Country Task Force) said that Singapore was a model for many small island developing States in terms of legislation and judicial and procedural arrangements relating to children's rights. While the State party had made significant progress in legislative areas, it was outcomes that counted. The review of the Children and Young Persons Act, for example, was a welcome exercise, but she wondered how the amendments would enhance the protection of children aged 16 to 18 in practice. For instance, would 16-year-old offenders still be tried in an adult court, or had the relevant provision of the Penal Code been amended? Similarly, the child-centred approach to the resolution of family disputes was commendable, but she wondered how the State party ensured that people were fully aware of all their entitlements under the law in that respect and what legal and other assistance was available to them if the judicial process was not affordable.

17. She had been pleased to hear that the age of criminal responsibility would be raised to 10, although that age was still below international standards. She had had some concerns about the justification given in the report for setting the age at 7, namely that it allowed the use of "a diversionary and restorative approach to address risk elements early in young offenders". She found that a specious argument: it was perfectly possible for such an approach to be adopted even where the age of criminal responsibility was considerably higher. In the same vein, she hoped that the Government would seriously consider changing the policy permitting life imprisonment for minors, which in her view was extremely problematic.

18. She would be interested in hearing more about the outcome of the State party's review of the laws on child pornography and sexual offences committed against minors, and about the progress made in strengthening the legal framework for the protection, safety and well-being of children and young people. While she welcomed the amendment to the Administration of Muslim Law Act that raised the minimum age for marriage to 18 years, she noted that there were reportedly some exceptions. She therefore recommended that the State party should review the amendment and promote compliance with the minimum age requirement through advocacy and public education.

19. As article 12 of the Constitution guaranteed freedom from discrimination, the State party should ensure that all children living within its borders, irrespective of nationality, enjoyed equal rights to education, health care and other public amenities. In that connection, she would be interested in learning more about statutory protection for children from Malay and other minorities.

20. **Ms. Otani** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know whether children of unmarried parents enjoyed equal treatment under the State party's law, for instance in terms of inheritance rights, and whether the stigmatizing term "illegitimate children" was used. She also wished to hear whether single mothers or unmarried parents were recognized as a family unit that could benefit from subsidized public housing. As same-sex relations were criminalized in Singapore, the Committee was concerned that children of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual parents might suffer discrimination and stigmatization in society. The Committee was also concerned that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual children might be subjected to discrimination, bullying, intimidation or violence at school or in their communities. Could the delegation comment on the attitudes of parents, teachers and the general public towards such children?

21. She would welcome further information concerning the State party's claim that it was striving to treat all children, including non-citizens, equally. She would also like data on the number of non-Singaporean and stateless children living in the country. Such children reportedly did not have access to free or subsidized public health, childcare and education services. Was that true?

22. The Committee would like to know whether the Administration of Muslim Law Act discriminated against girls in terms of inheritance, maintenance or custody. It would also like to hear whether the principle of non-discrimination was included in school curricula and incorporated in textbooks and other educational materials. In addition, the Committee would appreciate information on the multidisciplinary interview model for child victims of sexual offences, launched on a pilot basis in 2018. Had any assessment of that experience

been undertaken? The Committee would also like to know what concrete steps had been taken to ensure that the best interests of the child had been given primary consideration in the review of the Children and Young Persons Act, particularly as some of the proposed amendments might have an impact on children who needed alternative care.

23. She wondered whether there were any procedures and criteria for assessment and determination of the best interests of the child in judicial and administrative proceedings and whether welfare officers, lawyers and judges received appropriate training in that regard. According to the State party report, children's views were heard in legal proceedings, "where appropriate". She would appreciate a clarification of that precondition. Were any age criteria applied and were children heard in all judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them?

24. She had the impression that the child-specific platforms mentioned in the State party's replies to the list of issues were designed mainly for young people over 18 years of age. If that was indeed the case, she would be interested in hearing whether there were any platforms through which younger children could express their views and be involved in law and policy development. Were existing platforms accessible to children who tended to be marginalized, such as children with disabilities and non-citizens? It was important for children to be able to express their views not only in school, in the community and in court, but also in the family environment. Was parental respect for children's views promoted in the State party's family support and education programmes?

25. She would appreciate information concerning the impact of the Structured Decision Making system in terms of improving early detection and intervention. Had the system been assessed to identify any gaps or challenges, and had relevant professionals been trained to adopt a child-friendly and gender-sensitive approach to children covered by the system? She wondered whether the substantial increase in the number of reported child abuse cases could be attributed to more effective detection or to greater prevalence of abuse. She would also welcome information on measures to prevent abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation, and support for victims, such as counselling, shelter, reintegration and access to remedies. For example, had the State party conducted a national study on the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse and developed an effective policy to prevent and eliminate such acts? The Committee would appreciate statistics concerning the number of cases in which sexual exploitation and abuse had been prosecuted and punished.

26. She would like to know whether the Criminal Law Reform Bill retained marriage-based defences for sexual offences against children and, if so, whether there were any plans to amend such provisions. With regard to helplines, she wondered whether children knew where and how to report family, school, online or other forms of violence. In particular, were there procedures in place to enable children to report violence by teachers in a confidential and safe manner? How were such reports dealt with?

27. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Task Force) said that corporal punishment severely undermined a child's dignity and integrity in all circumstances. He noted with concern that the State party continued to permit such punishment, albeit as a last resort in exceptional cases. Nevertheless, in 2017 the State party's delegation had informed the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that it would consider the possibility of prohibiting such punishment. He wished to know whether any action had been taken in that regard.

*The meeting was suspended at 4 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.*

28. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that his country supported the spirit and intent of all articles of the Convention and sought to comply with them to the fullest extent possible. In some cases, however, their full implementation would violate local customs, laws and policies and Singapore had therefore entered reservations. He assured the Committee that his Government would continue to review the relevance and applicability of the country's reservations and declarations.

29. Singapore was one of the most densely populated territories in the world and was unique in terms of its multiracial and multi-religious populations. Those circumstances had

implications for some policies and practices. Steps were being taken to provide residential status, health care and education for eligible stateless children. While non-citizens did not enjoy free primary education, subsidies were provided to non-citizens belonging to low-income groups. Singapore would continue to review the applicable reservation.

30. Support for families with children was allocated without discrimination. As the fertility rate in Singapore was low, the Government was keen to encourage couples to have children. Families were allocated an increase in allowances under the Child Development Account for each child born. They were also offered support in fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

31. **Mr. Lim** (Singapore) said that, although his country had no national human rights institution based on the Paris Principles, compliance with the Convention was monitored by the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was composed of representatives of all ministries and agencies that dealt with children's rights and which engaged with civil society and relevant stakeholders. The Inter-Ministry Committee submitted key issues for guidance or decision-making to the Cabinet, which met almost every week.

32. The Ministry of Finance was responsible for drawing up the budget proposal of the Government as a whole, but due attention was given to proposals and initiatives submitted by other ministries, and high priority was accorded in the budget to programmes aimed at promoting the rights of vulnerable groups, including children and persons with disabilities. Children's rights and best interests were thus very much taken into account in the budgeting process.

33. A number of measures had been taken to protect the environment, including the setting of targets for the development of green and blue spaces, transport, resource sustainability, air quality, drainage and community stewardship. A Climate Action Plan outlined all mitigation measures adopted in key sectors. Singapore had signed the Paris Agreement and pledged to work towards stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions. It had adopted a public-private partnership strategy to raise environmental awareness among the general public, including young people. The authorities engaged extensively with business groups to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. There was also a network of teachers who served as environmental education advisers and implemented programmes for students and staff in schools. The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources organized a biennial President's Award for the Environment. Since 2006 a total of 13 educational institutions, including a primary school, had won the Award. A programme called "Start Small, Dream Big" had been launched at the preschool level to encourage young children to take part in community service projects, including projects related to environmental protection, and a Youth for the Environment Day was held each year.

34. The rise in the age of majority under the amended Children and Young Persons Act would lead to comprehensive changes across all sectors. The Government was reviewing relevant legislation, such as the Penal Code, and making changes to related policies and processes.

35. All children in Singapore were protected under the country's laws, regardless of whether they had Singaporean nationality. Non-nationals could access critical services, such as education, housing and health care. Although there were some schemes and subsidies that distinguished between nationals and non-nationals, the Government took a case-by-case approach and was prepared to exercise flexibility in the application of its policies when required.

36. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that there was no discrimination against the Malay minority. Indeed, there was an initiative in operation aimed at providing support for the Malay community. The meaning of "we", in answer to Ms. Winter's question, was "the Government", which actively sought out children's views and reflected them in its policy planning and measures.

37. **Ms. Winter** said that she hoped the delegation would comment on reports that some Singaporean mothers were unable to transfer their nationality to their children.

38. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that all children born to mothers who were citizens of Singapore were entitled to citizenship. There were no exceptions. Earlier in May 2019, the Parliament had adopted amendments to the Penal Code which raised the age of criminal responsibility from 7 to 10. Since the age had been 7 for decades, that was a significant step.

39. **Ms. Winter** said that, while such a step might have been significant, it remained very small. The Committee urged the State party to raise the age to 14.

40. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that the Government had considered setting the age at 12 years, but had decided to start by raising it to 10 on the basis of studies showing that a child that age was generally able to appreciate the importance of law and order, although there was no scientific consensus on the matter.

41. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that, in order to gain a sense of children's attitudes and aspirations, the Government engaged with child-focused civil society organizations and took account of their feedback. The Government also directly consulted children whom it considered sufficiently mature; for example, it had engaged with former young offenders, whose views had helped to shape some of the proposed amendments to the Children and Young Persons Act.

42. While it was possible for persons under the age of 18 to marry, very few actually did so: only 12 such marriages had taken place in the previous year. A special marriage licence was required if either member of a couple was under 18 years of age, and the couple had to attend a mandatory marriage preparation workshop. Attendance at a prenatal workshop was required if the female applicant was pregnant. All special licence applications were reviewed by a social worker to ensure that the couple had adequate family support and were prepared to take on the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood. Muslims under the age of 18 required the permission of the cleric who solemnized the marriage.

43. **Mr. Lim** (Singapore) said that there were various independent monitoring mechanisms in place in the area of children's rights. Examples included multidisciplinary panels offering recommendations on issues such as residential and foster-care placements and committees of experts who advised youth court judges on the ideal outcome of a given case. Examples of Government engagement with members of the public and independent experts included a working group set up to consider inclusive approaches to preschool education for children with disabilities.

44. Parents who were single, regardless of nationality, were eligible, on the basis of need, for all the subsidies and support available to two-parent families, including public housing, tax relief and financial assistance. Those subsidies were available through Social Service Offices and Family Service Centres. If the Government was unable to fully meet the needs of a family, it referred them to appropriate NGOs and community partners.

45. The Government took acts of bullying or violence against children, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual children, very seriously. As for child-specific platforms, there were consultation forums specifically tailored to children of various ages, such as visits to meet with pupils at inclusive preschools. Children were also able to use social media to express their views and assert their rights. Singaporean children had demonstrated good knowledge of their rights under the Convention.

46. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that all professionals who came into contact with children, such as teachers, medical professionals and law enforcement officers, were thoroughly trained to uphold and protect children's rights.

47. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that, at the end of 2018, there had been fewer than 50 stateless persons under the age of 18 in Singapore, which represented an 11 per cent reduction since 2016. Although Singaporean law did not provide for automatic citizenship for anyone born in Singapore, children who were not citizens at birth, including stateless children, could apply for citizenship. Applications from stateless children were carefully assessed on the basis of their individual circumstances. Such children enjoyed the same protection under the Children and Young Persons Act as Singaporeans, including access to basic health care and other essential services.

48. Singaporeans enjoyed the right to freedom of assembly, which was enshrined in the country's Constitution and legislation. However, in order to ensure public safety and maintain law and order, a permit was required. It was a criminal offence under the Public Order Act to organize or participate in a public assembly without a permit. The Act applied to children and adults alike. The only exception was in the area known as Speaker's Corner, where Singaporeans had the right, subject to certain conditions, to public assembly without a permit.

49. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he wondered whether the requirement for a permit would apply to an adolescent demonstrating against climate change outside her school as part of the global Fridays for Future movement.

50. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that such a child would need to apply for a permit from the police, but the application process was fairly short.

51. The low number of reported sexual offence cases showed that the harsh penalties provided for in various pieces of legislation, including the Films Act, the Undesirable Publications Act and the Women's Charter, served as an effective deterrent. The recent amendments to the Penal Code had introduced tougher sentences: in some cases, penalties for offences committed against children under the age of 14 had been doubled. New offences had been introduced, such as exploitative sexual activity with a minor aged 16–18, sexual communication with a minor, or the production or distribution of material portraying child abuse.

52. **Mr. Lim** (Singapore) said that only a handful of cases of unsuitable content had required the Government to take legal action against Internet service providers. Those cases had mainly related to coarse language unsuitable for young children.

53. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that relevant laws had been amended over the years to give the courts maximum discretion and flexibility in sentencing. Where possible, the authorities tried to avoid bringing children before a court at all, instead enrolling them in a pre-court diversionary programme. Life sentences could be imposed on persons under the age of 18 only for extremely serious crimes, such as murder or culpable homicide amounting to murder. All cases involving life sentences were reviewed after the prisoner had served 20 years to determine whether he or she was suitable for release.

54. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that the Government had put in place several measures to improve detection of child abuse, which were proving very successful. Since its introduction in 2015, the Structured Decision Making process had made it easier for professionals working with children to identify cases, and the number of investigations by the Child Protective Service had increased, reaching 1,100 in 2018. Steps had also been taken to increase reporting of child abuse, including the Break the Silence Against Family Violence public awareness campaign and the establishment of hotlines, such as Tinkle Friend, to enable children to report cases themselves. In addition, bystanders were being encouraged to intervene if they witnessed an instance of violence against a child, even in a family setting.

55. The Government viewed corporal punishment, in the form of caning, not as torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, but as a disciplinary measure appropriate for very serious misconduct. It was used only as a last resort, subject to strict guidelines and procedures. The Government respected parents' right to discipline their children as they saw fit, but was seeking to use positive parenting programmes to educate them on alternative methods. Social attitudes towards corporal punishment were changing quickly, as exemplified by his own case: when he had been a child, his father had caned him frequently, but he did not even possess a cane to use on his own children.

56. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that, while the Committee fully respected the State party's sovereignty and culture, as a human rights treaty body it was obliged to ask the State party to put an end to the corporal punishment of children, which was not only useless but also downright harmful. The State party had made impressive strides in protecting children's rights, which made its preservation of the colonial legacy of corporal punishment all the more baffling. He urged the State party to reconsider its stance on the issue.



57. **Mr. Nelson** said that he wondered why it was apparently permissible for staff members in the State party's schools to administer corporal punishment but not for those of its childcare centres and whether that distinction meant that it was acceptable to beat a child who was, for example, 10 or 12 years old but not one who was 7. One of the problems with corporal punishment was that, although it was supposed to be the last resort, invariably it was not.

58. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore), reiterating that social attitudes towards the discipline of children were changing rapidly, said that corporal punishment was allowed in some settings but not others because not all children – children in preschool, for example – would understand why they were being punished. Students learned well when the environment was conducive to learning, and there had to be order and discipline, although care and encouragement were equally important. Discipline helped students understand that their actions had consequences. In addition, disciplinary actions were paired with corrective counselling aimed at helping children to make better behavioural choices.

59. **Mr. Jaffé** said that research had shown clearly that corporal punishment was effective only as a means of immediately altering the behaviour of very young children. In other situations, it was wholly ineffective. It would be useful to have details on how life prison terms for minors could be reviewed over the course of the sentence. He wished to know what measures might be taken to reduce the sentence under favourable circumstances.

60. **Mr. Gudbrandsson**, agreeing that corporal punishment was ineffective and harmful, said that he would welcome an explanation of why there were relatively few reported cases of sexual abuse of children in the State party. He himself was from a country with a small population, Iceland, where there were nearly as many reported cases as in Singapore, which had a population many times larger.

61. **Ms. Khazova** said that the delegation should attempt to explain how beating children was compatible with the Convention and with the principle that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

62. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that Singapore would continue engaging in dialogue with the Committee in a bid to reconcile views of corporal punishment that, for the moment, did not fully coincide.

63. **The Chair** emphasized that the Committee's objective was to work with States parties to further the realization of children's rights, not to judge them for their shortcomings.

64. **Ms. Khoo** (Singapore) said that in their character and citizenship education courses, which were a mandatory part of the curriculum, students in Singapore were taught about the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination and encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and take a proactive approach to combating discrimination.

65. **Ms. Winter** said that she would welcome a comment on the accuracy of reports that some children, including children of persons with disabilities and children of incarcerated parents, did not have access to the State party's newly expanded network of kindergartens. The State party also seemed to make it difficult for incarcerated parents and their children to maintain family ties. A comment from the delegation in that regard would be appreciated.

66. She was concerned about reports that fatigued parents sometimes sought court orders for the removal of children that they felt unable to care for or supervise. She wondered what could be done to prevent them from taking such drastic action. She also wondered whether the State party could not find a way of preventing children without parental care from being placed in the same institutions as minors in conflict with the law. In that connection, she wondered why it was necessary at all for children to be placed in the Singapore Boys' Home or the Singapore Girls' Home while their cases were being investigated. Were there no families willing to foster such children for short periods?

67. Turning to the issue of adoption, she said that it was regrettable that mothers adopting a child who was more than a year old were not entitled to maternity leave. She

wished to draw the State party's attention to the potential link between intercountry adoption and trafficking in children. She wondered whether the State party had considered ratifying the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. In any case, she encouraged the Government to put in place an institution to deal with the issue of intercountry adoption.

68. Lastly, the State party appeared not to have taken steps to fulfil its obligations under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Sixteen-year-old children could still volunteer for service in the armed forces, for example. Singapore might not have experienced armed conflict since its independence, but that was not the only issue. State party authorities might well be called upon to deal appropriately with migrant children affected by armed conflict elsewhere.

69. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether the State party had plans to increase the number of places available in mainstream schools for children with moderate to severe disabilities. He wished to know what progress had been made towards ensuring that vehicles used for public transport, schools and other public places were accessible to persons with disabilities, including wheelchair users. It would also be interesting to know whether the State party intended to amend the law under which compulsory education was free of charge only for nationals of Singapore and whether any steps had been taken to make prenatal and postnatal health care and regular check-ups for young children more accessible to low-income mothers.

70. The State party's authorities were clearly aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, but he wondered whether they had made any plans to collect data on the practice. He also wondered whether action plans had been developed to ensure that policies on infant and young child feeding did not remain mere words on paper, whether the national Code of Ethics on the sale of infant foods was in line with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and what steps had been taken to make sure that the food companies that had participated in the drafting of amendments to the Code of Ethics had not acted solely in their own interests. In addition, he would like to know what percentage of the State party's hospitals had earned the "baby-friendly" certification as part of the baby-friendly hospital initiative and whether data were collected with regard to antiretroviral therapy for pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS. It would be interesting to learn why, under the State party's Employment Act, some workers, such as domestic workers and women who held top corporate posts, apparently did not enjoy the same labour rights, including maternity benefits, as other working women.

71. He welcomed the fact that sexuality education in schools was compulsory but, in the light of information indicating that such education mainly emphasized abstinence, he wondered whether information was provided on contraceptives and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. He also wished to know how sexuality education courses covered issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

72. With regard to mental health, he wondered whether steps should be taken to enlist mental health specialists, not simply police officers, in front-line efforts to combat suicide and, more generally, how the issue of mental health was approached in the State party's public policies. Was it State policy to prevent overreliance on medication and institutionalization in mental health care?

73. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** said that she would like to know whether the welcome extension of the Compulsory Education Act (2003) to include all children with disabilities had led to the enrolment of such children in mainstream schools. She wondered whether education should not be made available free of charge to all children in the State party, irrespective of nationality, since the State party required children to attend school up to the age of 15. Migrant children, after all, generally had no say in where they were taken by their parents. Should the State party not consider how it could create a more just society by ensuring that all children had equal access to high-quality education?

74. In view of the intense focus on academic performance in the State party, she wondered whether children had enough time for leisure, cultural and recreation activities. Educational standards were high, which led many to seek tutoring outside school. She

wished to know whether minority students, Malay students in particular, fell behind their peers because of their inability to gain access to special tuition and, if so, whether any special measures had been taken to help them catch up. Fear of academic failure was so intense that it sometimes affected young people's mental health and led to an increase in suicidal ideation. She wondered whether that issue had been studied and, if so, what had been proposed to address it.

75. It would be interesting to know to what extent human rights education was a part of the curriculum, including the curriculum for the in-service training of senior teachers, who might still be working in an authoritarian mode. She would welcome information on the mechanisms that were in place to ensure that the procedures for expelling perceived troublemakers from school were not misused to force students who were seen as a burden to the system to withdraw.

76. She wondered whether it was not contradictory for the Employment Act to allow the employment of, for example, a 14-year-old child who, under the Compulsory Education Act, was required to attend school. She would welcome a comment on whether there had been any studies of the apparently burgeoning phenomenon of child sex tourism and whether anything was being done to address the problem. She would also like to know whether it was mandatory to report suspected child abuse. In order to bring its juvenile justice legislation into line with the Convention, the State party should give serious consideration to abolishing the use of corporal punishment in the criminal justice system and changing the laws that allowed life sentences for juvenile offenders. Lastly, she wished to know how easy it was for a person born in Singapore to apply for Singaporean citizenship and whether a person making such an application was given any help.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*