



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 2379th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 17 May 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties *(continued)*

Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore (continued)
([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. Lim** (Singapore) said that his Government was committed to ensuring that every child, irrespective of his or her family background, had a good start in life. The number of government-supported kindergartens would increase from 24 to 50 by 2023, meaning that there would be places for two out of every three children in government-supported preschools. The Government provided subsidies to help cover the cost of childcare, with lower-income families receiving higher subsidies. A low-income family could pay as little as 3 Singapore dollars (S\$) per month for full-day childcare and S\$1 per month for half-day kindergarten. Further financial assistance was available to low-income families in the form of a grant to cover the initial cost of enrolling a child in preschool, making preschool effectively free for families with the lowest incomes.
3. Under the Preschool Outreach Programme, outreach workers conducted visits to families to assist them in registering their children for preschool and applying for subsidies. Some children still did not attend preschool, however, for a variety of reasons. Some families might not be aware of the various subsidy schemes available to help them, which was why the Government had increased its outreach and awareness-raising efforts. Challenging family circumstances might also prevent children from being enrolled in preschool or school. Such cases were of great concern to the Ministry of Social and Family Development and were examined by its frontline officers and its community partners, such as the Family Service Centres, with a view to providing the necessary support to the family and the child and addressing any underlying barriers that might prevent the child from receiving a good education.
4. The Committee had enquired about parents suffering from caregiver fatigue who might seek a court order for the removal of their children. The terms “caregiver fatigue” and “caregiver stress” referred to phenomena experienced by caregivers in the so-called “sandwich generation”, who had to take care of both children, in some cases children with disabilities, and elderly parents, many of whom were ill, frail or had disabilities. Caregiver stress was expected to become ever more prevalent, as life expectancies were increasing. Although respite services were available to assist caregivers, such services were not widely used. Sometimes caregivers felt guilt over putting their children in respite care; other times, the structure or convenience of the respite services was an issue. The Ministry of Social and Family Development would continue to monitor the issue closely and work with its community partners to make more support available and also encourage caregivers to make use of such support.
5. Children with special education needs who were able to follow the mainstream curriculum attended mainstream schools. More than 80 per cent of students with special education needs were fully included in mainstream schools and were supported with specialized manpower, programmes and services. Community integration services, which combined therapy, education and social support, were available to children with physical or sensory impairments. Some schools provided more specialized support for children with hearing loss or visual impairment, including specially trained teachers and assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software.
6. Children with special education needs who required a more customized curriculum and extra support attended government-funded special education schools, which were deliberately located close to mainstream schools to facilitate close partnerships and social and academic integration. A very small group of students with multiple disabilities – fewer than 10 students out of a cohort of approximately 36,000 – received home-based care. Children under the age of 7 with special developmental needs received support through government-funded early intervention programmes. The Government also funded integrated childcare programmes for children aged 2 to 6 with mild developmental needs,

enabling them to learn, play and socialize with their mainstream peers and thus preparing them for their eventual inclusion in mainstream education. The Ministry of Social and Family Development was planning to set up a cross-sectoral working group to examine how to strengthen support for children with moderate to severe developmental needs.

7. Students with disabilities had access to subsidized, accessible transportation to and from school. Public transportation systems were also accessible: 98 per cent of public buses were already wheelchair accessible and all buses would be so by 2020. Schools and preschools were also required to be accessible to children and other persons with disabilities.

8. The Government was trying to improve its methods for collecting, analysing and using data so it could better understand and address the issues faced by children and other vulnerable groups. At the same time, the Government was aware of the need to protect personal data and was therefore taking a cautious approach to data collection. Government agencies collected data on children in their respective areas of work and shared such data with other agencies when appropriate. The website data.gov.sg had been launched in 2011 as a one-stop portal to facilitate access to publicly available information from government agencies.

9. **Ms. Bajrai** (Singapore) said that the Protection from Harassment Act 2014 established cyberbullying and cyberstalking as offences and provided civil remedies. The Act was currently being amended to further strengthen the laws on cyberbullying so that the disclosure of personal information with intent to harass or cause harm to others would be criminalized. The amendments would, inter alia, streamline court processes and ensure their accessibility, enhance protection for victims and enable third parties to file applications for protection on behalf of victims.

10. All Singaporean laws were public and could be accessed online. Parliamentary debates on the enactment and amendment of legislation were also public, and the media were sometimes used to raise awareness of laws that were of particular interest to the public. The State Courts website contained videos explaining the Protection from Harassment Act 2014 in the four official languages of Singapore and also provided information on how to file for protection against harassment.

11. Various forms of legal assistance were available in Singapore. The Legal Aid Bureau provided assistance to persons involved in civil actions who passed a means test and satisfied other eligibility criteria. The Bureau offered legal advice, representation in court and assistance with the drafting of legal documents. The Law Society of Singapore ran a legal clinic that offered free basic legal counselling. It also had a criminal legal aid scheme that provided assistance to accused persons who could not afford a lawyer. The Family Justice Courts website provided explanations of various legal processes in all four official languages.

12. Freedom of expression and freedom of association and peaceful assembly were protected under the Constitution; however, they were not unqualified rights and must be exercised in accordance with the law and in the context of broader societal needs, which included respect for the rights or reputations of others, and the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals. Singapore, like many other countries, had laws on defamation, which primarily governed private actions between private parties and were not aimed at limiting freedom of expression. The laws requiring permits to be acquired before holding demonstrations were necessary to maintain a balance between competing rights in a small, densely populated, multiracial, multi-religious and multicultural society like Singapore. The Government recognized that freedom of expression and freedom of association and peaceful assembly were necessary for a fair and peaceful society and welcomed public discourse and civic participation. Such rights were important for children's development, and all children were encouraged to make their views known, including through student government bodies.

13. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that family preservation was a priority for the Government and that families in difficulty were provided with support so that they could continue to care for their children. When a child could not remain with his or her biological family for safety reasons, he or she would be placed whenever possible in family-based

care, either with extended family or friends or with a foster family. Children's safety and timely reintegration into their families, where possible, were considered vital.

14. Multiple hotlines provided children with various options for reporting abuse. Children were taught sexuality education at school and learned about so-called good touches and bad touches. Children could report abuse to their teachers, school counsellors, law enforcement officers or social workers. In general, children found it easier to report abuse committed by non-family members. If a student was being abused by a teacher, he or she could report the abuse to another teacher, the principal or a school counsellor, all of whom were trained to deal with such disclosures and to provide emotional support. Once the child's allegations had been verified, the school authorities would alert the police or the Child Protective Service. However, usually a student who was being abused by a teacher preferred to report the abuse to his or her parents. Mandatory reporting of child abuse did not seem necessary, as public awareness-raising efforts and the use of screening tools had already led to a significant increase in the number of child abuse reports.

15. Public outreach was key to the prevention of child abuse. The Government had therefore embarked on outreach efforts at the grass-roots level to encourage community members to report suspected abuse. Victims of child abuse were eligible for rehabilitation and were offered assistance ranging from social and psychological support to medication. Children who were able to safely return to their family homes were taught skills that would enable them to remain safe. They also had access to a safety network that they could turn to in the event of another abuse incident.

16. Beyond Parental Control orders could be issued by the courts only if deemed to be in the best interests of the child. Parents could apply for such orders if they felt unable to guide or control their children, but there were high legislative thresholds to ensure such orders were not issued prematurely. Increasingly, the courts would require the parents and their child to undergo a family reconciliation programme in order to resolve any issues and to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Only as a last resort would a child be placed in a children's home. The Child Protective Service increasingly favoured the use of family-based care. In 2013, only 29 per cent of children under the Beyond Parental Control regime had been placed in family-based care, while 71 per cent had been in children's homes, whereas now 54 per cent of such children were placed in family-based care. Those who were placed in children's homes were housed separately from children in conflict with the law, although they might attend programmes together, with appropriate staff supervision.

17. Under the Intestate Succession Act, children born out of wedlock could inherit part or all of their mother's estate if there were no surviving legitimate children; they could not, however, inherit any of their father's estate, unless the father had specifically indicated otherwise. Child representatives were sometimes appointed in the Family Justice Courts to represent the best interests of the child in divorce proceedings. The representative would ascertain the child's views and allow the child to be involved in the decision-making process, taking into consideration his or her age and maturity.

18. Adoptive mothers of infants were eligible for parental leave during the first year of the infant's life. After the first year, all parents, both biological and adoptive, were eligible for childcare leave. Singapore already had strong safeguards against child trafficking and other potential dangers arising from international adoptions, but was nevertheless reviewing its adoption laws. During the review, it would take the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption into account and consider its ratification. Persons who engaged in child trafficking and similar offences as part of an adoption proceeding were liable for prosecution and, if found guilty, the adoption order would be set aside.

19. Since 2012, it had been compulsory for prospective adoptive parents to attend a briefing to ensure that they were adequately prepared and understood the process involved, especially in the case of international adoptions. The eligibility requirements to become an adoptive parent were strict and the authenticity of the documents submitted as part of the adoption application was rigorously checked. Prospective adopters were required to sign a declaration certifying that they were not undertaking the adoption process for any unlawful purposes and that they understood the applicable penalties for any offence committed.

Independent assessments and home inspections were carried out as part of the adoption procedure, and the Ministry of Social and Family Development investigated all complaints received.

20. The pilot multidisciplinary interview process had been implemented in June 2018 with a view to minimizing trauma for victims of child abuse who required forensic and medical examination at the hospital. The process reduced trauma by allowing a single interview to be conducted at the hospital, rather than subjecting the child to multiple interviews by law enforcement officers, doctors and other professionals. Victim care officers were on hand to guide children through the interview process. The results of the pilot experience would be assessed in June 2019 and any necessary adjustments would be made before its full implementation.

21. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that Singapore enjoyed one of the lowest crime rates in the world and the number of incidents of sexual abuse was low, owing to an effective criminal justice system. Nevertheless, the situation was constantly monitored to keep abreast of new technological developments that might give rise to new forms of abuse. An amendment to the Women's Charter in 2016 prohibited online platforms that offered or facilitated the provision sexual services, a change that would help combat the increasing use of the Internet for child sex tourism. Internet service providers were required to offer content filtering services that removed pornographic and other undesirable content, with a mandatory free trial period for all new customers. Under their licensing conditions and the Internet Code of Practice, providers were also required to ensure that online material did not go against public morality, public interest, national harmony, good taste or decency. Parents, schools and the wider community played an important role in promoting safe practices online. Cyber wellness education was provided in all schools with a view to empowering students to take responsibility for their own safety and well-being on the Internet. However, the large number of websites and chat rooms hosting anonymous and transient exchanges made it impossible to protect children completely.

22. All applications for citizenship, including those lodged by stateless persons, were assessed on the basis of a range of criteria. A guide was available online to assist applicants in the process, and the application status could be viewed online. The authorities proactively contacted applicants to request additional supporting documents where necessary. In general, it took 6 to 12 months to process an application. Those who failed to obtain citizenship were not denied access to essential public services such as health care. Children were entitled to education and health care regardless of their nationality or their status as stateless persons, and authorities were able to provide financial assistance to families who could not afford certain services, subject to consideration on a case-by-case basis.

23. All persons sentenced to life imprisonment were eligible to undergo a review for potential release after serving 20 years. The review took into account factors such as the person's risk of reoffending, the progress made in terms of rehabilitation and the person's potential for reintegration into society. Persons aged between 16 and 18 who had been sentenced to life imprisonment were housed separately from the general prison population to allow their specific rehabilitation needs to be met.

24. Children of incarcerated parents were encouraged to visit regularly in order to maintain strong family ties and facilitate family reintegration upon release of the incarcerated parent. The Singapore Prison Service ran programmes with social services agencies to help inmates build stronger bonds with their families. Since 2014, the Singapore Children's Society had run Project Relate to facilitate communication between incarcerated parents and their children and help those children cope with their parent's imprisonment.

25. In cases of attempted suicide, the police and the Civil Defence Force were the first to respond. The police had a special crisis negotiation unit comprising police officers and psychologists trained in negotiation tactics and suicide intervention. After a successful intervention, the person concerned was sent to the Institute of Mental Health for assessment and treatment.

26. **Ms. James** (Singapore) said that, in view of the complex and multifaceted nature of mental health, a whole-of-society approach was adopted whereby many government ministries and agencies worked in partnership with each other and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to build mental resilience among children and young people. Social and emotional skills were taught as part of the school curriculum and programmes were in place to help students manage stress. Teachers were trained to identify students who showed signs of distress and to provide the appropriate support or to refer the student to a school counsellor. Community mental health teams worked closely with school counsellors to provide school-based care to students with psychological, emotional and behavioural problems. Children were offered the treatment considered most appropriate, which was not necessarily medication. Emphasis was placed on community-based rather than institutional care for children with mental health problems.

27. Although the suicide rate among adolescents in the country remained low, a research group had been set up in 2017 to study suicidal behaviour and self-harm among children and young people. The group was collaborating with the relevant government agencies to identify risk and protection factors that influenced such behaviour, determine areas for further study and make recommendations to improve the current approach to the issue.

28. Nobody in Singapore was denied basic care for financial reasons. Health services, including prenatal and postnatal care, were heavily subsidized by the Government and were therefore accessible to women on low incomes. Further financial assistance was also available where needed. Such support was available until the child reached 3 years of age. A mobile application was available that gave notifications regarding child vaccinations.

29. The Ministry of Health encouraged mothers to breastfeed their babies exclusively for the first six months after birth and to combine breastfeeding with complementary feeding for infants aged between 6 and 12 months. All three public hospitals in the country – at which more than half of babies were delivered nationwide – had been accredited as baby-friendly and all seven private hospitals providing maternity services would receive the accreditation by 2020. The upcoming national population health survey would gather data on breastfeeding. It would commence in July 2019 and the results would be published in 2021.

30. The Health Promotion Board had launched a multimedia campaign to promote breastfeeding and was working to educate children and young people on nutrition with a view to instilling good dietary habits from a young age. The Healthy Meals in Schools Programme, which required school meals to incorporate the four main food groups, would be rolled out in all primary and secondary schools and in most preschools by December 2019.

31. The review of the Code of Ethics on the sale of infant foods, conducted in January 2019, had expanded the Code's scope to cover food intended for infants up to the age of 12 months rather than 6 months, extended restrictions on infant foods industry sponsorship, established a penalty framework and introduced additional baby formula labelling requirements. While the Code was largely in line with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, it did not include components such as guidelines on complementary foods. The Ministry of Health would consider incorporating those components in subsequent reviews of the Code. Penalties for non-compliance included "naming and shaming" and written warnings. An independent association representing the Singapore infant foods industry had been invited to participate in the review of the Code in order to provide practical information and help ensure the successful implementation of the Code. The association did not represent the views of individual companies.

32. Amendments to the Employment Act, effective as of April 2019, had removed the salary threshold for professionals, managers, executives and technicians, meaning that all women, including those in senior executive positions, were entitled to maternity benefits. Domestic workers were covered under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.

33. All persons living with HIV were encouraged to undergo antiretroviral therapy, which was especially important for expectant mothers in order to avoid mother-to-child transmission. Patients were given appropriate counselling and follow-up. In 2017, the vast majority of pregnant women living with HIV had received antiretroviral treatment. Students

were taught about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in schools as part of the science curriculum, and community-based programmes helped to raise awareness among young people on the transmission of such infections and the importance of avoiding unprotected sex. The programmes encouraged young people to abstain from casual sex, to be faithful to their partner, to use condoms and to take steps to detect HIV early. Teachers handled issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons sensitively and taught students to develop their own identities and to respect the identities of others.

34. **Ms. Khoo** (Singapore), noting that the Committee had raised some legitimate concerns regarding access to education for non-citizen children, said that Government was committed to providing high-quality basic education for all children. Singaporean children were required to attend national schools under the Compulsory Education Act, in order to build a strong national identity. It would not be reasonable to apply the same requirement to non-Singaporean children. The Ministry of Education worked with other government agencies to ensure that affordable private education was available to non-Singaporean children. The quality and safety of private education was regulated through legislation such as the Private Education Act. Nevertheless, efforts were made to allow as many non-Singaporean children as possible to enrol in national schools. In fact, the majority of such children attended national schools. Given that inequalities in education were due mainly to family circumstances and income disparities rather than nationality, the Ministry worked with social support and other agencies to provide comprehensive assistance to low-income families. Efforts were also made to raise awareness among parents on the importance of education.

35. In the past, children with moderate to severe disabilities had been exempt from the compulsory education requirement, since they had been enrolled in special education institutions. However, the amendment to the Compulsory Education Act had removed that exemption and recognized special education institutions as national schools.

36. Students were not expelled from school because they were considered to be troublemakers or a burden to the system. All children were encouraged to remain in school for as long as possible, and currently fewer than 1 per cent of children in each cohort dropped out. In order to reduce that percentage even further, a task force had been established to investigate the root causes of long-term school absenteeism and dropout. Early-intervention measures were taken to assist students as soon as they started to miss school or show signs of disengagement from their education. Teachers provided counselling and attempted to determine whether problems at home might be affecting their performance and attendance. The Enhanced Step-Up Programme was aimed at supporting children who ended up dropping out of school. Such children were encouraged to pursue alternative options, such as vocational training, and were allowed to return to school when they were ready. On their return, they were assigned a school counsellor so that their progress could be closely monitored.

37. All teachers attended in-service professional training to ensure that their practices and attitudes continued to evolve. Such training included seminars on environmental matters, freedom of speech, and combating racism and other forms of discrimination. Teachers were also trained in strategies for promoting a safe and respectful classroom environment in which all students' voices were valued. Despite the strong focus on academic study and attainment in schools, children had sufficient time and opportunity to participate in leisure and recreational activities. Resources were set aside to enable children to join clubs where they could engage in sports or cultural activities.

38. Although the vast majority of children under 15 years of age were in education, the Employment Act permitted children to work, subject to specific conditions and limitations. The total number of hours that a child spent at school and at work each day could not exceed a certain limit. Children were permitted to undertake only light work in non-industrial settings and were required to obtain medical certification in order to be able to work. Under the Employment Act, parents could be prosecuted if they allowed their children to engage in unlawful employment.

39. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that the Government was committed to providing the best education to children in Singapore, irrespective of their

language, religion or ethnic affiliation. The Government worked with community partners, such as Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community, in order to improve the educational levels of Malay students. Statistical data indicated that educational and income levels had risen in the Malay community in recent years. The proportion of Malay students entering post-secondary education had increased, as had the proportion of such students who passed State examinations. Recently, the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs had launched an initiative to support the Malay community in the areas of marriage, parenthood and early childhood education.

40. Over the years, the Government had worked with the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore with a view to enhancing the protection afforded to Muslim women and children. The Council's Fatwa Committee had issued various fatwas aimed at protecting the financial welfare of Muslim women and their dependants under legislation governing inheritance in the Muslim community.

41. **Mr. Tan** (Singapore) said that the Government respected the principle of non-refoulement. No child would be forcibly returned to his or her country of origin, or any other country, if he or she were at risk of becoming a victim of the offences covered by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. When children at border crossings showed signs of distress, or when they sought assistance, border officials ensured that they received the necessary support and were referred to the appropriate agencies for assessment. In all cases, officials took steps to provide for the immediate needs of vulnerable children, ensuring that they had shelter, sufficient food and, if necessary, medical care.

42. The recommendations made to Singapore in relation to the Optional Protocol ([CRC/C/OPAC/SGP/CO/1](#)) had been published online, and the Government had reviewed its policies and practices to determine how it could best give effect to those recommendations. To that end, it had modified the armed forces recruitment website and application forms to ensure that persons under the age of 18 were explicitly informed of the obligations of Singapore under the Optional Protocol. It had also developed education modules, aimed at military commanders, on the practical application of the Optional Protocol. Serious consideration was being given to the possibility of reducing, from three months to one month, the period of notice that underage volunteers were required to give when requesting release from military service.

43. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Task Force), noting that the delegation had said that 80 per cent of children with disabilities attended mainstream schools, said that he would like to know what type of education was received by the remaining 20 per cent of such children. It was still not clear to him whether the Compulsory Education Act covered children who were not Singaporean nationals. It was also not clear whether foreign women who were domestic workers or top corporate executives enjoyed the same right to breastfeed their children as women who were nationals of the State party and whether adolescents who were above the age of consent were entitled to receive impartial advice on contraception and avoiding unwanted pregnancy. Would such advice also be available to lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender adolescents?

44. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi**, noting the apparent connection between the State party's highly competitive education system and the relatively large proportion of Singaporean children who had reported having suicidal thoughts, said that the Government might wish to consider changing the system with a view to placing greater emphasis on nurturing children's self-confidence.

45. **Ms. Khazova** said that she wished to know what proportion of children were born out of wedlock in the State party and whether such children were entitled to receive financial support from their fathers. She would also like clarification of whether divorced parents normally shared custody of their children.

46. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would like to know the number of the child support hotline mentioned by the delegation, when that hotline had been set up, whether children were aware of it, what kinds of cases were reported and how it was managed. She would also like to know the HIV seroprevalence rate; whether the State party had implemented the World Health Organization Option B+ programme, which required treatment to be

administered from the fourteenth week of pregnancy; whether programmes for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV had been implemented at all health-care facilities and whether training on mother-to-child transmission and antiretroviral therapy was provided to all health-care workers. Lastly, she wished to know the mortality rate among persons with tuberculosis/HIV co-infection, and she would like to hear how tuberculosis was managed, including in prisons.

47. **Ms. Skelton** said that she wondered whether the delegation considered it reasonable for means tests to be applied in decisions concerning the granting of free legal aid to children, given that children had no income. With regard to the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the State party might consider following the example of Scotland, whose Parliament had recently voted to raise that age from 10 to 12 years and had pledged to consider raising it further in 5 years' time.

48. **Ms. Otani** (Country Task Force) said that she would like clarification of whether children who were not Singaporean nationals enjoyed the same access to subsidy schemes for low-income families as children who were nationals. She would welcome information on whether the Administration of Muslim Law Act contained provisions relating to the custody of children whose parents had divorced.

49. She would also appreciate clarification of whether, under the amended Criminal Procedure Code, the reporting of sexual abuse and exploitation remained mandatory. Noting that, in certain circumstances, girls aged 16 and 17 years were able to marry, she asked whether the sexual abuse of such girls would be considered an offence if the perpetrator was their husband. She wondered whether any measures were being taken to prevent children from committing acts of sexual abuse and thereby avoiding the harsh penalties imposed on perpetrators of such acts.

50. **Mr. Nelson** said that he wished to know how many children had applied to the police for a permit to protest against government policies on issues such as climate change and how many such applications had been granted. If there had been no applications, he wondered whether children were too afraid to seek permits and whether the Government might consider treating applications from children differently from applications submitted by adults.

51. **Mr. Gudbrandsson**, noting that investigations of child abuse often resulted in the re-victimization of the victims, said that he would like to know whether representatives of the justice system were involved in the multi-agency interviews conducted to investigate allegations of child abuse.

52. **Ms. Winter** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) asked whether the minimum age at which individuals could volunteer for the armed forces was still 16 years. If so, were volunteers under the age of 18 years trained in the use of weapons, and were they excluded from combat situations?

53. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he wished to know what punishment would be imposed on an adolescent who, taking inspiration from the climate activist Greta Thunberg, staged a protest without a police permit.

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

54. **Mr. Lim** (Singapore) said that most children with disabilities attended special education schools if they were not enrolled in mainstream schools. A handful of children with multiple severe disabilities received support that enabled them to be educated in other settings, including the home. The Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment had last been revised in 2013. The Code required all new buildings to be fully accessible and encouraged the retrofitting of existing buildings.

55. Low-income families were eligible for health care, education and other social services. Social workers operating out of the Family Service Centres were expected to provide support to everyone in need, including non-nationals. Government staff worked with community support providers in order to meet the needs of families, including non-nationals, that were not covered by government schemes.

56. **Mr. Tan** (Singapore) said that the minimum age for enlisting in the military was 16.5 years. Protection measures were applied to minimize disruption of children's education. No incentives were offered for volunteering. Young people who enlisted before the age of 18 underwent comprehensive medical and psychological assessments. Enlistees under the age of 18 did not train with weapons and were legally prohibited from participating directly in hostilities.

57. As the Optional Protocol did not require States parties to extend criminal jurisdiction extraterritorially to cover all offences included therein nor to make such offences extraditable, the Government had no plans to amend the legislation in that regard. Nonetheless, Singapore remained committed to strengthening international norms and had recently endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

58. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that, although there were legal limitations on the inheritance rights of children born out of wedlock, under the Wills Act individuals could leave their estate to whomever they chose, including children born out of wedlock. Children born to unmarried parents made up under 2.5 per cent of all children born in Singapore.

59. The Government understood the trauma that divorce could cause for children and had set up agencies to provide child-centric divorce support services, which included a mandatory pre-divorce programme to help parents develop a parenting plan and a post-divorce child access scheme to allow parents who had undergone an acrimonious divorce to visit their children in a secure setting. The courts could also appoint a person to represent children during the divorce process to support their interests. Joint custody was awarded in about 74 per cent of cases.

60. Children could call the toll-free helpline to report instances of abuse or neglect. The helpline number was 1800 777 00 00. In 2018, 1,160 of the 3,200 calls received had been investigated by the Child Protective Service. Court personnel, in order to preserve their impartiality, did not participate in the multidisciplinary interview process. Nonetheless, all court personnel were educated on trauma-informed care, and children received adequate support throughout the trial.

61. **Ms. Bajrai** (Singapore) said that the means test applied by the Legal Aid Bureau was based on household income. Other legal aid schemes run by the Law Society of Singapore were not means-tested.

62. **Ms. James** (Singapore) said that all high-income women had the same maternity rights under the Employment Act, regardless of nationality. Foreign domestic workers were excluded from those provisions, however, as one of the conditions for the issuance of their work permits was that they would not become pregnant during their period of employment.

63. The HIV risk had remained constant since 2008, with some 450 new cases reported per year. The notification rate had been 10.9 per 100,000 population in 2017, and the mortality rate had been 18.2 per million. Option B+ was used to prevent mother-to-child transmission and all health-care professionals were trained accordingly. Tuberculosis had accounted for about 25 deaths in 2017, making the mortality rate 0.6 per 100,000. All health-care professionals remained alert to signs of the disease when examining patients, including in prisons.

64. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that the delegation had taken note with appreciation of Ms. Skelton's suggestion regarding the age of criminal responsibility. The Criminal Law Reform Bill would not affect the provisions on mandatory reporting of sexual abuse and exploitation included in the Criminal Procedure Code. In addition, while the Bill provided that married minors could consent to sexual intercourse with their spouses, it also provided that, in the absence of consent, the spouse could be charged with rape. The delegation welcomed the recommendations regarding the creation of a separate process for children to apply for permits for peaceful assembly or protest, but wished to note that such action was not the only means through which children were able to express their views.

65. **Ms. Khoo** (Singapore) said that freedom of expression was valued in the education system, which was designed to cultivate critical thinking and encourage children to take

action for causes in which they believed, including in collaboration with teachers, peers and NGOs. She was not sure how a child who chose to lead an unauthorized protest would be treated, but she hoped that fear of retribution would not discourage children from taking action. She could assure the Committee that any action taken in respect of a child was taken with the child's best interests at heart.

66. Schools provided non-judgmental counselling about pre-marital sex with the aim of empowering teenagers to make informed decisions and take protective measures. School counsellors were encouraged not to impose their personal values, but rather to take a holistic approach based on the child's needs and level of maturity. They also received training on the additional support needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children.

67. While school subsidies were differentiated by citizenship, government and community schemes were available to support non-citizen students from low-income families. The Government was working to ensure that all low-income students received adequate financial support, regardless of citizenship. The societal view that education was the only path to success had led to a highly stressful and competitive educational environment. Over the previous decade, the Government endeavoured to shift attitudes by emphasizing that each child had unique strengths and by promoting a wider range of educational pathways and life skills.

68. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that all parents had a legal responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of their children, regardless of custody arrangements and regardless of whether the children were legitimate or illegitimate. The courts could order parents to pay a maintenance allowance if they failed to uphold their responsibilities.

69. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked whether the State party had considered using a shorter telephone number for the helpline, so that it would be easier for children to remember. She also asked how the helpline was managed, whether complaints were submitted by children or parents and what was done to ensure that children were aware of the number.

70. **Mr. Ammayappan** (Singapore) said that, although the helpline number was relatively easy to remember, the Government recognized that younger children were less able to report abuse. It sought to educate children about their rights and provided training on the signs of abuse for all persons who worked with children.

71. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that anyone in distress in Singapore could call 999 for assistance.

72. **Ms. Otani** asked whether the version of the Penal Code provided on the government website was the amended version.

73. **Mr. Ho** (Singapore) said that the version on the website was not the amended Penal Code. Once in effect, the amended version would be posted online.

74. **Ms. Winter** said that she wished to commend the delegation for the extensive and precise information provided. Although the Committee welcomed the many positive legal changes introduced, it encouraged the Government to pay greater attention to the emotional and psychological needs of children and families.

75. **Mr. Bin Ibrahim Khan Surattee** (Singapore) said that the Government remained committed to providing all children with the opportunity to succeed. It would continue to pay close attention to emerging challenges that posed a threat to children's well-being and rights, in particular the dangers of the digital environment and the issue of mental health. Although Singapore had been recognized as one of the best countries for children to grow up in, the Government was aware that there was room for improvement in its practices and would take into account all the comments made during the dialogue.

76. **The Chair** said that he hoped that the State party would prohibit corporal punishment in the very near future.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.