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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Note verbale dated 4 June 2013 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the secretariat of the Human Rights Council and has the honour to refer to the attached statement, which was delivered during the general debate on items 2 and 3, held on 4 June 2013, on the quadrennial analytical report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on conscientious objection to military service (A/HRC/23/22).

The Mission has the honour to request that the statement* be circulated as a document of the twenty-third session of the Human Rights Council, under agenda item 3.

* Circulated in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

[English only]

General debate on items 2 and 3 following the presentation of thematic reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Secretary-General at the twenty-third session of the Human Rights Council, on 4 June 2013

Quadrennial Analytical report of the OHCHR on Conscientious objection to military service (A/HRC/23/22)

Mr President

My statement refers to the quadrennial analytical report of the OHCHR on conscientious objection to military service (A/HRC/23/22) which was prepared in pursuant to resolution A/HRC/20/2.

As stated in our statement at the end of the 20th Session of the Human Rights Council, Singapore does not recognise the universal applicability of the right to conscientious objection to military service. The premise of the resolution 20/2, and by extension the OHCHR report 23/22, goes beyond what is prescribed in international law and applicable human rights instruments. Conscientious objection to military service has been referred to in the resolution and report as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as laid down in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, what they failed to highlight is the important fact that Article 29 of the UDHR and Article 18 of the ICCPR recognise that the exercise of the rights and freedom of an individual is subject to the necessity of ensuring public order and the general welfare of the society.

National defence is a fundamental sovereign right under international law. Where individual beliefs or actions run counter to such a right, the right of a State to preserve and maintain national security must prevail.

Whereas some States may choose to establish a standing army, for a small country like Singapore, compulsory military service is the only way to build up a credible national defence force. This system is only viable under the principle of universality where every male Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident, regardless of race or religion, is required by law to fulfil compulsory military service to defend our country. Under such a system, allowing any individual or group, for whatever reason including on the basis of conscientious objection, to be excused from military service will fundamentally undermine the concept of collective responsibility for national defence, compromise national values and violate the principle of equal application of the law.

Thank you, Mr President.
