

ARTICLE 4

SPECIAL MEASURES

1. *Adoption by State Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination, as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.*
2. *Adoption by State Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.*
- 4.1 The State concept of a Singapore society is based on family values which is idealised in a model of the traditional nuclear family with men as heads of the household. The concept of meritocracy, though strongly ingrained in our education system and national psyche, is undermined by the ubiquitous emphasis on the family and its prescribed gender roles, especially with regards to women in the workforce. Women are more often than not, still perceived by their role(s) in the family – as caregivers - as opposed to their individual capabilities in the workforce.
- 4.2 AWARE asserts that this strong ideology shapes societal attitudes - women feel pressed to fulfil traditional gendered roles of “daughter”, “daughter-in-law”, “mother”, “nurturer” first – followed by the workplace role of “leader”, “politician” or “administrator”. Women thus enter the labour market and politics with existing responsibilities to home and moderate their aspirations to maintain a balance among their various roles.
- 4.3 There is also a common assumption that all Singaporeans are on a level playing field and have the same opportunities to succeed in what is purported to be a meritocratic society. However if men and women are socially conditioned by different and prescribed family roles, they are not operating on a level playing field. Meritocracy, a treasured value, in these instances, is unlikely to be effective in promoting social mobility between the class levels or the genders. Articles in the Singaporean press have reported on class immobility - that students from different social classes were not all judged equally for Public Service Commission scholarships in Singapore¹. There seemed to be an unfair advantage from the better-off students who have more opportunities than a student from a poorer background. Men and women may not start from a level playing field. Girls in a traditional nuclear family set-up, will face challenges in striking out hard in the workforce. AWARE believes that such mindset problems require special measures to address imbalances and promote equality for women and men, both on the home and work fronts.

¹ See Appendix 4.1. ‘Social escalator needs oiling’, by Janie Heng, *The Straits Times*, 28 August 2008 and ‘Poor kids need aspiration; they must not be allowed to sink into apathy and stop striving’, by Rachael Chang, *The Straits Times*, 23 March 2011.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Political Representation

- 4.4 There is an increasing number of female graduates, and numbers are growing at a faster rate than that of their male counterparts². Despite the rapid rise of highly educated women, there has yet to be an equally substantive growth in the amount of female presentation in the country's politics. Female representation in Parliament moved from 20.5 percent since the 2006 May elections to 21.84 percent at the most recent election in May 2011. The watershed elections saw 19 women elected as MPs amongst a total of 87 MPs, including our first woman opposition MP. Though it is a slight improvement over 2006, it is still well below the required 30 percent regarded as necessary for women to assert an significant influence in politics³. As of March 2011, Singapore ranked 43 out of 186 countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Statistics based on May 2006 election results⁴. Women, for all their better education, have low representation in boardrooms too. (See also Article 7 para 7.3).
- 4.5 In the State's Fourth Periodic Report, Singapore responded to previous requests for establishing temporary special measures by stating that "the introduction of quotas in Parliament is not a favoured option to boost female representation, as Singapore operates a system based on meritocracy"⁵. However, female political representation in Singapore remains low.
- 4.6 Rwanda has proven successful with its implementation of temporary special measures. In 2003, its Constitution set the quota of women holding seats in the Chamber of Deputies to be 30 percent of 80 seats⁶. Five years later, the tiny East African country became the first country in the world to elect a majority of women to its legislative assembly, with women occupying 45 out of 80 seats in Parliament⁷. The IPU ranked Rwanda 1 out of 186 countries⁸. Another example is Norway, a developed country that also built up its women representation through a quota process which was introduced in the 1970s when

² MCYS gender statistics for 2009 show 51.4% females compared to 48.6% males. <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/GraduatesfromUniversitiesbyGender.aspx...> accessed 11 March 2011.

³ 'World parliaments still have glass ceiling for women: EU study', *AFP*, 7 March 2008

⁴ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm...> accessed 5 April 2011.

⁵ 'Responses to the list of issues and questions with regards to the consideration of the third periodic report – Singapore', CEDAW, available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws39.htm...> accessed 14 January 2009.

⁶ 'Rwanda female-majority House elects Speaker after historic poll', *Daily Nation*, 6 October 2008, available at: <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/africa/-/1066/477882/-/148sb2oz/-/index.html> ... accessed 5 April 2011.

⁷ http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2265_A.htm ... accessed 5 April 2011.

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm ...accessed 16 March 2011.

there were only 15 percent women in the Norwegian National Assembly. In recent years the figure fluctuates between 36 percent and 39 percent⁹.

Senior Management

- 4.7 Women still trail behind men in senior management jobs. Data from the Ministry of Manpower shows that even though women make up about 43.6 percent of the 1.96 million resident labour force. Of the 856, 000 employed women, only 28.5 percent of women worked as managers or were proprietors or professionals. In contrast there were 36.4 percent men in similar occupations amongst the 1.1 million employed males¹⁰.
- 4.8 In terms of wage inequality, 20,900 women were earning SGD 10,000 a month and above in 2007, compared with 65,500 men who came under the same earning bracket in 2007¹¹. In the report half as many women were employed as senior managers and only 1/3 of them earned SGD 10,000 a month and above. This does not correlate with the ratio of female and male graduates which shows more women than men graduating with a university degree in Singapore¹². (See also Article 11 para 11.34).

Foreign Wives

- 4.9 The issue of foreign wives was raised in AWARE's CEDAW Shadow report submitted in 2007 and also in the Concluding Comments of the UN CEDAW Committee. The Committee was concerned about the situation of "foreign wives of Singaporean citizens, especially in regards to violence and abuse, their right to work and their residence status in the country"¹³. In a recent newspaper article¹⁴ it was reported that the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority received an average of 15,400 long-term visit passes and 9,900 permanent residence (PR) applications annually between 2005 and 2009 from foreign spouses of Singaporeans. Of these, 14 percent of the long-term pass application and 45 percent of the PR requests were rejected. With the growing numbers of women coming into the country to work and to become wives and mothers, it is important that we set up a task force to study the matter and offer sound policies that do not compromise on the dignity of the individual.

⁹ <http://www.norway.org/aboutnorway/society/Equal-Opportunities/gender/politics/> ... accessed 4 April 2011.

¹⁰ Report on the Labour Force in Singapore June 2010, Table 28.

¹¹ 'What women really want – flexibility' by Ramchandai Nisha, *Business Times*, 8 March 2008.

¹² MCYS gender statistics for 2009 show 51.4% females compared to 48.6% males. <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/GraduatesfromUniversitiesbyGender.aspx> ... accessed 11th March 2011.

¹³ CEDAW Committee 39th Session Concluding Comments: Singapore 2007.

¹⁴ 'In love and apart. Foreign brides unable to get PR or visit passes face family stress' by Theresa Tan, *The Straits Times*, 30 April 2011.

- 4.10 Marriages between citizen grooms and non-citizen brides make up 78 percent of all marriages between citizens and non-citizens in 2009, with the majority of non-citizen spouses coming from Asia¹⁵. There is a growing need to examine the issues that foreign wives face. More vulnerable than Singaporean wives, they are often financially dependent on their husbands, have no kin here to turn to, and may have problems communicating. Furthermore, foreign wives who are abused in their marriage may be unwilling to report problems out of fear that their social passes may be cancelled by their husbands and they be repatriated to their home without their children¹⁶.
- 4.11 Foreign spouses may be disadvantaged in a number of areas. Insurers do not cover them under the same terms as Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. Foreigners do not have access to the social security provided by Central Provident Funds (CPF) and are charged higher prices at polyclinics, specialist clinics and certain hospital wards. In a divorce, foreign brides who have been unable to prove any financial contribution during a short marriage will be unlikely to receive any of her husband's assets¹⁷. If they are abused they will need a shelter space as they have no family in Singapore. (See also Article 5 para 5.6, Article 6 para 6.26 and GR 19 para 19.19).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Political Representation

- 4.12 AWARE urges the Government to recognise the lack of women's representation in politics. To ensure women's participation in the political arena, quotas should be established to place women at all levels of governance, including setting aside 30 percent of seats in the Parliament for female politicians. The publicly elected Members of Parliament can appoint women to these seats. Such provisions can be created through a constitutional amendment or a special temporary measure for 5 to 10 years.

Senior Management Jobs

- 4.13 AWARE highlights the need for women to take on more decision-making roles in the workplace. The Government should push for public listed companies in Singapore to have a minimum percentage of women on their company board. Furthermore, the Government can introduce a management trainee programme for female graduates within the civil service to prepare women for upper management levels as well as introduce mentoring programmes. Targets can also be set for the participation of women in recruitment programmes and promotion exercises.

¹⁵ National Population Secretariat at 2010. Population in Brief 2010, National Population Secretariat, Singapore, <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/people/popinbrief2010.pdf> ... accessed 8 April 2011.

¹⁶ See Appendix 4.2. 'Foreign bride: I live in fear everyday', by Theresa Tan, *The Straits Times*, 23 June 2007.

¹⁷ 'Money matters when you marry a foreigner', by Chan Teik Leong, *The Straits Times*, 11 February 2007.

Foreign Wives

- 4.14 AWARE urges the Government to set up a special task force to examine the issues that foreign wives face and to educate them about their access to legal aid and social services.