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OHCHR REGISTRY

10 SEP 2008

Recipients : ADU

**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE  
GENEVA**

Note No. 419/08

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Anti-Discrimination Unit of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to refer to the latter's Note Ref: 255.sa.mdp dated 17 January 2008 transmitting a questionnaire relating to the preparations for the Durban Review Conference. The Permanent Mission has the further honour to transmit the annexed response from the Government of the Republic of Singapore.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Anti-Discrimination Unit of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

9 September 2008

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Anti-Discrimination Unit  
United Nations Office at Geneva

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**REPLIES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE FOLLOW-UP MEASURES OF THE  
DURBAN WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,  
XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE**

**Question 1:** Can you assess the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in your country?

**Question 2:** Can you assess contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance as well as initiatives in this regard with a view to eliminating them in your country?

**Question 3:** Please identify concrete measures and initiatives for combating and eliminating all manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in order to foster the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

**Question 4:** How would your Government assess the effectiveness of the existing Durban follow-up mechanism and other relevant United Nations mechanisms dealing with the issue of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in order to enhance them?

**Question 5:** What are the steps taken by your Government to ratify and/or implement the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and give proper consideration of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination?

**Question 6:** Please identify and share good practices achieved in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in your country.

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Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. We value our current state of communal harmony and make continued efforts to ensure that discrimination based on race and religion has no place in our country.

**Singapore's Constitution** - Provisions within our Constitution guarantee, among other things, the equality of all persons before the law and the humane and fair treatment of all persons detained by public authorities. The Constitution forbids the discrimination in our laws against citizens on the grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth. The Constitution also guarantees the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate one's religious belief so long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality.

**Laws against Racism** - The Government has put in place legislation and law enforcement measures to safeguard against racial discrimination. For example, the Sedition Act makes it an offence to conduct any act aimed at promoting feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the Singapore population. Recent amendments to the Penal Code enhanced penalties against offences which are racially or religiously aggravated. The Penal Code also criminalises acts which deliberately wound the religious or racial feelings of any person, promote enmity between different groups on ground of religion or race and are prejudicial to maintenance of racial/religious harmony. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act empowers the Government to make a restraining order against religious personalities who cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different religious groups.



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The **Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR)** set up in 1973 scrutinises legislation passed by the Parliament to make sure that proposed laws do not discriminate against any ethnic or religious community. The Council also considers and reports on matters affecting persons of any ethnic or religious community, which are referred to it by the Parliament and Government. Members of the PCMR are eminent citizens who are both well-qualified to undertake this responsibility and independent from the Government or the various political parties. The PCMR is currently headed by the Chief Justice of Singapore.

In addition to legislative measures, the Government plays an active role in fostering interaction and engagement among the different communities by encouraging them to come together and work towards common goals and benefits. An example of this is the **Community Engagement Programme** which is an overarching effort by the Government to foster unity and resilience among the various communities in Singapore. Started in February 2006, it involves leaders from a cross-section of our society - grassroots organisations, businesses, unions, media, educational institutions, and religious and community leaders. This is a proactive approach to build closer ties across groups so that Singapore can be resilient and bounce back from crises, especially those with race or religious overtones.

Under the CEP, the **National Steering Committee (NSC) on Racial and Religious Harmony** was set up in September 2006. It is chaired by the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, and comprises community and apex religious leaders. The NSC provides a national platform for ethnic and religious leaders, and the political leadership to dialogue, build a network of trust, and formulate strategies to strengthen community interaction and engagement.

Another key component of the CEP is the **Inter Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs)**. There are 84 IRCCs throughout Singapore. Each IRCC consists of key leaders from local religious and ethnic organisations and informal leaders in the local community. IRCCs aim to foster friendships and build trust during peace time so that Singapore can withstand any challenges and strains on our social cohesion during crises. In the aftermath of a crisis, IRCCs will be the key links to disseminate timely and accurate information, and maintain confidence in the local community. To date, 84% of all religious organisations in Singapore have become members of IRCCs. Under this programme, community leaders have taken the initiative to organise and conduct activities to build better understanding and relationships between the people of different races and religion.

**Employment** - Singapore takes a multi-pronged approach to tackling employment discrimination. The Government recognises the need not only to encourage progressive employment practices, and help employers build capability to implement such practices, but more importantly to change the mindsets of unenlightened employers. Singapore thus leverages on our strong tripartite relationship with employers and unions, taking a primarily promotional and educational approach to reach out to employers who may not be aware of the need to implement fair employment practices. At the same time, there are channels for employees who experience discrimination in employment to raise these issues with the Government. Where instances of employment discrimination are established, the Government takes them very seriously, and will not hesitate to take action against the employer in question.

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In May 2006, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up to encourage employers to adopt fair and responsible employment practices. TAFEP issued the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices in May 2007 that identified fair and progressive HR practices in areas such as job applications, interviews, progression, and grievance handling. The Guidelines are to help employers recruit based on objective criteria and adopt progressive in-employment processes which give employees opportunities for growth and development based on merit. In November 2007, the Tripartite Centre for Fair Employment was also established as the promotional arm of TAFEP to promote fair employment through a multi pronged strategy of creating awareness, educating employers on the business benefits and facilitating the adoption of fair employment practices at the workplace.

**Education** - The Compulsory Education (CE) Act, enacted on 1 January 2003, provides for 6 years of compulsory primary education for Singaporean children. The aim is to provide every Singaporean child with the same head start in life and to teach him/her the foundational knowledge and skills that will enable him/her to further his/her education and training later on.

Apart from providing equal opportunities for all students regardless of race, gender, language, religion and socio-economic status, the Singapore education system is also instrumental in shaping a multi-racial society under one common identity. The schools provide the common space for students to interact with one another, regardless of race, language, religion or social backgrounds.

**National Education**, delivered through both the formal and non-formal curriculum, aims to help students learn, understand, and appreciate the diverse cultures in our society. In the formal curriculum, the Civics and Moral Education curriculum serves as a key platform for inculcating values of respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience and harmony. Through the Social Studies curriculum, students learn about the multiracial, multicultural and multireligious society around them as well as the sense of belonging to family, school and community. Teachers also infuse national education messages into the syllabus. For example, national education issues could be discussed in subjects such as the General Paper, History, Geography and Economics. In the non-formal curriculum, the Community Involvement Programme is one of the avenues for students of different ethnic backgrounds to work together on activities and projects that benefit the society. In addition, students are also given opportunities for overseas exchange programmes that aid in the development of their social and cultural skills. Through interaction with peers of other races and nationalities, students acquire a deeper appreciation of different cultures and deepen their sense of social identity.

**Bilingualism** is another cornerstone of Singapore's education system and all students study both English and the mother tongue languages. Since 2005, in addition to English and mother tongue languages, schools have been offering Conversational Chinese and Malay so that their students will have the opportunity to learn another mother tongue language other than their own. This helps to enhance interaction among Singaporeans of different races, and strengthen social cohesion.

In conclusion, legislative and policy measures as well as community efforts have contributed towards the maintenance of racial and religious harmony in Singapore.