



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

231 EAST 51ST STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10022
TEL: (212) 826 0840 FAX: (212) 826 2964

**STATEMENT BY MS MARY WONG,
DELEGATE TO THE 63RD SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON AGENDA ITEM 56,
ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN,
THIRD COMMITTEE,
14 OCTOBER 2008**

Mr Chairman, my delegation and I congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the Third Committee and thank you for presiding over the meeting this morning. The United Nations places a premium on the welfare and advancement of women. This is seen in the Millennium Development Goals, about half of which are devoted to improving education, healthcare and protection of women all over the world. Singapore aligns itself with these goals and is fully committed to working towards their achievement.

2 Plato once said “If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things”. Singapore is a society which holds dear the ideal of meritocracy. In education and the workforce, equal opportunities exist for the best candidates, regardless of gender and race. In this regard, the percentage of female students who manage to secure much sought-after places in Singapore’s universities and polytechnics has seen a steady increase from 42% in the 1990s to the current 50%. As a vice-principal myself, and having taught in Singapore government institutions, I have seen first-hand how education has empowered many of my students, regardless of gender and social background, to gain admission into the best universities. One of the schools I taught in was featured in a *Wall Street Journal* newspaper article, entitled “Gateway to the Ivy League”¹. The school was so-named because 40% of its students were given places in the Ivy League universities in the United States. And this was no private school. The school, like any other government school which charges only \$15 a month for its school fees, admits students purely on merit. Like all schools in Singapore, its priorities are in giving both boys and girls equal opportunities to excel in sports, aesthetics, community and intellectual pursuits.

3 In this competitive and inter-connected 21st century where talent is a highly

¹ URL of the *Wall Street Journal* article “Gateway to the Ivy League” :
http://online.wsj.com/article_email/SB108379707388803277-IZjgYNilaN3mpuaoGGcKuDm4.html

valued resource, we invest heavily to nurture every individual, to contribute to Singapore and the world at large. In 2006, for example, there were 1861 applicants for the Public Service Commission government undergraduate scholarships, out of which 47% were female applicants. After a gruelling selection process, there were as many female awardees as male awardees, despite the lower percentage of females who applied! This is clearly an example of how the government has provided, regardless of one's gender and social background, equal access to opportunities for all.

4 In light of the above, it is no wonder that women have earned themselves creditable positions in the workforce. In 2007, females made up some 43% of the work force, compared with a figure of 38% in 1992. The Government recognizes that men and women have the right to equal remuneration in work of equal value. Therefore, 5 years ago, Singapore ratified a key International Labour Organization Convention – *Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration* to signify its commitment to equal pay for equal work. In addition, a Tripartite Declaration on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Performing Work of Equal Value was issued in 2002. From that point forward, employers and unions have been requested to incorporate an appropriate "equal remuneration clause" in their contracts and agreements. In addition, the Ministry of Manpower, together with the National Trade Union Congress, has developed a set of guidelines under the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices to ensure that employers recruit, select and reward their employees based on their merits. To date, 863 companies, government ministries and statutory boards have signed this pledge to show their commitment to this cause.

5 Women in Singapore are given the same opportunities as men to enjoy a full range of human rights. In the political arena, since taking over as Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong had publicly urged more women to run for office as Members of Parliament. Women have also made inroads into major leadership positions in the private and public sectors. For example, the group CEO of the largest listed company, Singapore Telecommunications Limited, is Ms Chua Sock Koong. In humanitarian work, 35- year old Dr Wong Ting Hway was the first Singaporean to work full-time with the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the area of union work, Madam Halimah Yacob, a qualified lawyer and a Member of Parliament, was the first Singaporean to be elected into the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation in 1999.

6 Singapore has taken a stakeholder approach with regard to policy formulation. This involves taking into account, where appropriate, the impact of policies on different stakeholder groups, including women. This is illustrated in the gender-specific formulations of policies with regards to ageing and helping women cope with work-life balance. With greater independence and financial freedom, women are choosing to marry

later. In an attempt to arrest the downward trend in fertility rates in Singapore, the Government had recently increased the period of paid maternity leave to 16 weeks. The most significant measure to promote family-friendly working arrangements is perhaps the creation of a Work-life Works fund (W-O-W! in short). This \$20 million fund was set up to help companies defray the costs of investing in family-friendly work arrangements.

7 In this regard, Singapore believes that there must be shared and equal responsibilities between men and women in society. The Association of Devoted and Active Family Men (ADAM) was set up in 2004 to raise awareness on men's responsibilities and roles in the society. This complements the efforts by the Centre for Fathering which was set up in 1999 to champion the role of responsible fatherhood in Singapore. The government also makes provisions for male civil servants to take paid childcare leave to care for their sick children while the Ministry of Education also extends the possibility of applying for flexi-work schemes to husbands. By spearheading this, the government sends a strong signal to employers and Singaporeans that each must play his part so that progress may be achieved for society as a whole.

8 Mr Chairman, Singapore has come a long way in its attempt to empower and enrich the lives of women who is an asset and rich resource to the country. As early as 1995, Singapore has acceded to CEDAW as a sign of commitment to this cause. In addition to the advancement and progress of women, Singapore is also committed to protecting them from violence through its Constitution, the Penal Code and the Women's Charter. Where health is concerned, good prevention and screening health services for common women-related diseases are made accessible and affordable to the majority of Singaporean women.

9 To sum up, I would like to draw your attention to a quote by Mrs Laura Bush, the First Lady of the United States and honorary ambassador for the UN Literacy Decade, who said, "Reaching women with literacy education is especially important because of the profound impact that women have on their families. If women are educated, everything across the board improves for their families - their family's health, their family's education level, and every other indicator," Singapore sees every need to invest in compulsory education, and to provide equal opportunities for males and females to progress. This has provided perhaps the highest leverage point for Singaporean women to achieve success in the national and global arenas. We look forward to empowering these women to in turn, champion the advancement of women on the international stage.

10 Mr Chairman, Singapore remains committed to this worthy cause. Thank you.

.

