



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

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**STATEMENT BY MR ANG ZHONGREN,
DELEGATE TO THE 65TH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON AGENDA ITEM 28,
ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN,
THIRD COMMITTEE,
TUESDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2010**

Mr Chairman,

We stand on the cusp of a historic moment in global efforts to advance women issues and rights. Member States have created a new entity - UN Women - to oversee the promotion and advancement of the rights of women and girls worldwide. In an equally bold move, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed Ms Michelle Bachelet as the first Under-Secretary-General for Women. Ms Bachelet herself is an iconoclast, being the first woman to hold the Presidency in her native Chile, and she looks set to blaze new trails in her latest appointment. Under her leadership and with the cooperation of Member States, Singapore is confident that UN Women will be a strong advocate for the global goal of achieving greater gender equality.

2 In Singapore, our governing philosophy centres on the principle of meritocracy. The ability of a Singaporean to advance in life is not based on arbitrary criterion such as race, religion, family, class or gender, but based solely on merit, resulting from hard work and achievement. This not only allows Singapore to have the best people in leadership positions in politics, business and civil society, it also minimises any form of positive or negative discrimination against any class of persons, which could result in tensions and disgruntlement.

3 At the same time, Singapore recognises the importance of gender equality. Being a small nation with no natural resources other than our people, we thrive by developing each and every member of our society, men and women alike, to their maximum potential.

4 We believe that meritocracy and gender equality are compatible principles. In our experience, the true advancement of women is best achieved by having the government and society provide the right environment with equal opportunities.

5 Singapore's efforts in advancing the status of women rest on a comprehensive legislative base. Our Constitution guarantees the equality of all persons before the law and forbids the discrimination against citizens on any grounds. The Women's Charter, in place since 1961, provides the legal basis for equality between husband and wife and safeguards women's rights in matters relating to marriage and upon divorce. The Penal Code protects women and girls from sexual and physical abuses while the Employment Act prevents discrimination in recruitment, promotion and terms of employment. The Employment Act also provides for maternity benefits and makes it unlawful to retrench female employees who are absent during their maternity period.

6 Legislation is complemented by Singapore's education policy, which provides for equal opportunity for both sexes in schools and tertiary institutions. In this regard, we have achieved significant success. The literacy rate of women reached a historic high of 94.7% last year. Today, women account for slightly more than half of the student population at our local universities. We are also seeing better representation of women in traditionally male dominated courses such as engineering and hard sciences.

7 Our policies seem to have reaped results. More women have chosen to enter the work force. In 2008, we achieved a labour force participation rate of 55.6% for all females and 57.7% for married women. The latter statistic is reflective of the increasing number of dual income families which reduces the financial dependency of women on their husbands. The income gap between men and women in Singapore is also narrowing especially for our younger and better-educated women who now earn wages comparable to their male counterparts. With more women entering our workforce, the challenge for Singapore has been to positively shape mindsets and behaviour to effectively deal with issues of workplace discrimination. To this end, in 2006, Singapore formed the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (or TAFEP) to raise awareness of fair and responsible employment practices and facilitate the adoption of such practices among employers. Since then, more than 1,000 organisations have signed TAFEP's Employers' Pledge of Fair Employment Practices.

8 The involvement of women in key decision making positions is often used as a gauge of gender equality. Singapore has also moved positively in this aspect. In the civil service, we now have 6 female Permanent Secretaries compared to just 1 in 2001. In politics, 22 out of 92 MPs are women with 4 of them holding political office. Significantly, the first female full Minister was appointed in May last year. Outside the public sector, many females have also broken glass ceilings to become CEOs of companies.

Mr Chairman,

9 Singapore has taken large strides in the advancement of women's issues and rights. However, as US Secretary of State, Mrs Hillary Clinton noted during International Women's Day in March last year, "no nation in the world has yet achieved full equality

for women". As such, Singapore will continue to work towards gender equality for its population under a meritocratic framework. Thank you.

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