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Universal Periodic Review

Singapore's National Report 2021

I. Introduction

1. Despite coming a long way since independence was thrust upon us in 1965, Singapore continues to face existential challenges. We are the only city-state with the full functions of a sovereign country, with no hinterland or natural resources. 2020 brought the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic (“the pandemic” henceforth), which resulted in unique challenges due to our position as a globally connected city. Yet, by international standards, Singapore has done well.

II. Singapore's Approach to Human Rights

2. To understand Singapore's approach to human rights, it is necessary to understand the context in which Singapore exists. We are a small, densely populated, multi-racial, city-state. Of Singapore's approximate population of 5.69 million, 3.52 million are citizens, of which ethnically 75.9% are Chinese, 15.0% are Malay, 7.5% are Indian, and 1.6% fall into the Others category. 0.52 million are permanent residents. The remaining 1.64 million are foreigners on long-term work or visit passes. 16.8% of citizens are above 65 years in age. According to a Pew Research survey in 2014, Singapore is the most religiously diverse country in the world. Nationhood for us has always been the challenge of forging different communities into one people. Pursuing development and creating opportunities for our people remain of existential importance. We work continuously to maintain harmony and equality in this diverse population.

3. Singapore's approach to human rights is premised on two tenets. First, human rights do not exist in a vacuum but must take into account a country's specific circumstances including its cultural, social, economic, and historical contexts. Second, the rule of law is an essential precondition and bedrock for promoting and protecting human rights. Like all countries, we have to balance the rights of individuals and society. We must constantly resist calls to privilege any group over another and bear in mind how the primordial forces of race, language and religion had threatened to tear our society apart in our formative years.¹ Our leaders hence decided to build a society that would accommodate all ethnic groups and recognise all religions as equal. We respect the fundamental human rights enshrined in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and will continue to do all we can to sustain an inclusive and cohesive society.

¹ In 1964, two separate series of race riots involving clashes between ethnic Chinese and Malays occurred in Singapore, leaving 36 people dead and 560 injured. Five years later, a spillover of racial unrest from Malaysia which was fuelled by rumour-mongering amongst the local Chinese and Malay communities, resulted in seven days of communal riots in Singapore. Those riots claimed four lives.

4. Another early developmental challenge was building the key pillars of a functioning society – healthcare, housing, and education. Over the decades, we built a robust, quality and affordable healthcare system. More than 90% of Singaporeans own their homes, many benefitting from subsidised good quality public housing. We have also built a strong and internationally commended education system.

III. Stronger Together – Shaping Singapore’s Shared Future

5. The pandemic has “stress-tested” all countries politically, socially, and economically. Singapore’s response to the pandemic has demonstrated that we have the social capital to emerge stronger and deal with future crises. Singapore has taken decisive action, including setting up the Emerging Stronger Taskforce in May 2020, to identify opportunities in the post-COVID world. In line with the Singapore Together movement, we are also expanding and growing common spaces, both real-world and virtual, for engagement and interaction to advance inclusiveness, cohesion and social resilience. The Government also organised a series of Emerging Stronger Conversations (ESCs) for Singaporeans to share their hopes and plans for a more caring, cohesive, and resilient post-COVID-19 society.

IV. Methodology

6. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is an opportunity for Singapore to take stock of our progress, identify challenges, hear the views of others and engage our citizens and civil society on the way forward on human rights. After our first UPR in 2011, Singapore supported in whole or in part 84 of 112 recommendations. After our second UPR in 2016, we supported in whole or in part 125 of 236 recommendations. An Inter-Ministry Committee on Human Rights tracks and reviews the implementation of our recommendations. This report describes the implementation of the recommendations Singapore accepted in whole and significant related policy developments since our second review, but not all, due to space constraints.

7. The Government has engaged civil society on issues raised by them. The Inter-Ministry Committee on Human Rights conducted three rounds of consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs) on thematic lines to ensure that a representative spread of CSOs were engaged on the issues touched upon in this report.

V. Building an Inclusive Society

8. We seek to build a nation where every citizen, irrespective of race, religion, or income level, benefits from society’s progress. We continue our efforts to create an enabling environment in which all Singaporeans have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to their fullest potential while strengthening

measures to assure individual rights. Our approach focuses on delivering positive outcomes that will be sustainable through future generations.

1. Children and Youth (Recommendations 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 58, 59, 98, 149, 174, 175, 223)

9. Our children and youths are our future, and their well-being is of utmost importance to us. Singapore supported Recommendations 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 58, 59, 98, 149, 174, 175 and 223. Singapore is fully committed to our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and submitted our combined fourth and fifth periodic reports (CRC/C/SGP4-5) to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2019. We are seriously considering the Committee's comments as we continue to safeguard and advance the best interests of our children. Singapore is taking steps towards meeting the requirements of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Some of the enhanced legislative protections against child prostitution and child pornography are described below.

10. Strengthening legislation to protect children and youth. Children's rights and protections are contained in the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA), the Women's Charter and the Penal Code. We amended the Penal Code in 2019 to strengthen protection for children and youths against sexual exploitation. In particular, we introduced:

- a) Offences to criminalise the production, distribution, advertising, and possession of child abuse material;
- b) Offences to criminalise sexual communication with or sexual activity in front of a minor;
- c) An offence relating to exploitative sexual activity with minors from 16 to 18 years of age; and
- d) Enhanced penalties for certain offences committed against children below 14 years of age.

11. Parliament has passed amendments to the CYPA to raise the age limit of a child or young person in need of protection or rehabilitation from below 16 years to below 18 years.

12. Protecting child victims. The Criminal Justice Reform Act 2018 emphasised the need for the criminal justice system to treat child victims and witnesses in a manner sensitive to their trauma and needs. It is now an offence to knowingly publish information that can identify the complainant or alleged victim in child abuse cases. The alleged victim's evidence must be given *in camera* in

criminal trials of child abuse cases, unless he or she elects otherwise. Alleged victims of child abuse cases may be allowed to testify behind a physical screen.

13. Giving every child a good start. Our annual spending on early childhood education has tripled from around S\$360 million (US\$273 million) in 2012 to S\$1 billion (US\$759 million) in 2018, and will double to over S\$2 billion (US\$1.52 billion) in the next few years. We continue to improve access to early childhood education to level the playing field for children from lower-income households. As of January 2020, low-income working families can pay just S\$3 (US\$2.30) a month for full-day childcare or S\$1 (US\$0.76) a month for kindergarten services at government-supported preschools. By 2025, 80% of preschoolers can have a place in government-supported preschools, up from just over 50% today.

14. Children from disadvantaged families. In partnership with multidisciplinary professionals and the community, we are expanding outreach to children aged 0-6 from low-income families under the KidSTART programme, to provide upstream and holistic support for children's health, social, and development needs. The programme will benefit 5,000 more children by around 2023, up from over 1,000 children today. In 2018, we established the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT) to tighten collaboration amongst government agencies, schools, social services and volunteers, and to identify and plug gaps in the current ecosystem of support for such children.

2. Women (Recommendations 65, 66, 67, 81, 106, 114, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 151, 208, 209, 210)

15. Singapore's women have come a long way since our independence. We celebrate their achievements, appreciate their contributions and respect their growing standing in society. Singapore supported Recommendations 65, 66, 67, 81, 106, 114, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 151, 208, 209 and 210.

16. The Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) monitors the implementation of Singapore's CEDAW obligations. The CEDAW Committee considered Singapore's fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/SGP/5) in 2017. In 2020, Singapore launched the Conversations on Singapore Women's Development, a national conversation series to gather feedback from thousands of Singaporeans on issues concerning women at home, at work, in schools, and in the community. The Conversations will culminate in a White Paper to be submitted to Parliament in 2021, with recommendations and a roadmap to further advance women's protection, interests, and development in Singapore.

17. Increasing participation. Singapore actively supports women's participation in politics and in public service. In 2017, Singapore's first female President, Halimah Yacob, took office. In 2020, 28 out of 95 Members of

Parliament (29%) were women, greater than the Inter-Parliamentary Union's world average of 24.5%. Currently, we have nine women out of 37 political office-holders. Women also make up 53% of the Public Service (as of 2019). The Council for Board Diversity, formed in January 2019, promotes greater representation of women on boards of listed companies, statutory boards, and non-profit organisations.

18. Support for women in the society and family. Many women continue to shoulder many household and caregiving responsibilities. We have continued to enhance measures to promote sharing of domestic and family responsibilities, such as flexible work arrangements (FWAs). From 2018 to 2020, we committed more than S\$200 million (US\$152 million) in financial grants and developed practical guides to support employers in implementing and sustaining FWAs. Since 2017, fathers have enjoyed two weeks of paid paternity leave and can share up to four weeks of their spouses' maternity leave. Under the national movement, "Dads for Life", we have rolled out initiatives, such as "Dads@School", to promote active fathering. Since 2017, single mothers also enjoy the same infant care and childcare subsidies and maternity leave as married mothers.

19. Islamic law is applied for certain religious and personal matters pertaining to Muslims in Singapore. The application of Islamic law in Singapore takes into account evolving societal contexts and norms. For instance, in May 2019, the fatwa (religious ruling) on joint tenancy was revised to recognise joint tenancy contracts as religiously valid, without the need for additional documents to effect the right of survivorship. This protects Muslim widows, in particular, from financial distress and uncertainty.

20. Enhancing protection against violence. Singapore has robust legislation criminalising violence under the Women's Charter, the CYP A, the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA), and the Penal Code. With effect from January 2020, we fully repealed marital immunity for rape and expanded the definition of rape to cover non-consensual oral and anal penetration by the penis. We also enhanced penalties for a range of offences committed against persons vulnerable to harm, including children, domestic helpers, persons in intimate relationships with offenders, and persons with disabilities whose mental or physical disabilities render them substantially unable to protect themselves from abuse. To promote awareness and encourage discussion on family violence, the Break the Silence campaign was launched in 2016.

21. We recognise that laws alone cannot resolve the multifaceted issue of family violence. The Taskforce on Family Violence was set up in February 2020, to bring together members from the Government, the Courts, and partners such as hospitals, family violence specialist centres, crisis shelters and family service centres, to put forth recommendations on tackling family violence. The taskforce is expected to report on its findings and recommendations later this year.

3. Migrants (Recommendations 79, 94, 130, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137)

22. Singapore appreciates the contributions of our migrant workers (MWs) and has taken active measures to advance their well-being. Singapore supported Recommendations 79, 94, 130, 132, 133, 135, 136 and 137.

23. MWs, including foreign workers (FWs) and foreign domestic workers (FDWs), make up a sizeable part of Singapore's workforce. We work continuously to review and improve measures to safeguard their well-being.

24. Legislative protection. FWs are accorded the same rights as local workers under the Employment Act (EA), Workplace Safety and Health Act, Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA), and Employment Agencies Act. The EA was amended in April 2019 to improve protections (e.g., overtime pay, rest days, hours of work) and enhance dispute resolution processes. FWs' employment rights are also protected under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA).

25. Domestic workers in Singapore, including FDWs, are protected by a comprehensive framework of laws and enforcement measures that account for the different work arrangements of the domestic workplace. The EFMA safeguards the rights and well-being of all FDWs, including adequate daily rest and weekly rest days (or compensation in-lieu). We have also enhanced protections for FDWs against abuse. The Penal Code was amended in 2019 to double the maximum punishment for persons convicted of causing hurt, assault, sexual offences, and wrongful restraint or confinement against FDWs. The withholding of work permits or passports against MWs' wishes is also illegal.

26. Education, outreach, and training. Our Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (such as Migrant Workers' Centre (MWC), Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE), Aidha) are invaluable partners in shaping the MW landscape, and ensuring that MWs understand their rights and responsibilities and are aware of the avenues of assistance. NGOs co-implement programmes with the Government, such as conducting the Settling-in-Programme upon arrival, distributing handy guides, and building up a pool of MW ambassadors to disseminate information and share updates. NGOs also provide vocational training and financial literacy courses.

27. Improving avenues of recourse. We have improved access to recourse and remedies for MWs and local workers. In 2017, we established the Employment Claims Tribunal (ECT) as a one-stop avenue to resolve a wide range of employment disputes, and the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) to provide mediation as an intermediate step before the ECT. 90% of employees who lodged salary claims between 1 January 2019 and 30 June 2020 successfully recovered their salaries in full at the TADM or ECT. Two FDW NGOs began offering free dispute resolution services for FDWs and employers in 2019, to resolve disputes not involving regulatory breaches.

28. Well-being, health, and safety. A 2018 FW Experience Survey found that nine in ten FWs in Singapore were satisfied with working in Singapore and would recommend their families and friends to work here. Employers of all MWs are responsible for workers' medical expenses and must ensure that their workers have acceptable accommodation and access to food. Employers must purchase medical insurance of at least S\$15,000 (US\$11,400) for semi-skilled and mid-level skilled FWs. In 2020, limits for medical expenses, and compensation limits for death and permanent incapacity under the WICA were increased to keep pace with wage growth and healthcare costs. Employers of FDWs must purchase Personal Accident Insurance of at least S\$60,000 (US\$45,560) against accidental death and permanent disability.

4. Persons with disabilities (Recommendations 114, 129, 224, 225, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231)

29. Singapore strives to build an inclusive society that supports the integration of persons with disabilities. Singapore supported Recommendations 114, 129, 224, 225, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231. Since 2007, Singapore has developed five-year plans, known as Enabling Masterplans, comprising measures to integrate persons with disabilities into society. We have embarked on the Third Enabling Masterplan (2017-2021), after extensive consultation with stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, their families, caregivers, social services agencies, professionals, employers, and practitioners. The Masterplans promote the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities, with initiatives across areas such as early intervention, education, employment, transport, health, adult care, accessibility, and technology.

30. Social integration. Singapore has made significant strides in improving accessibility. All public bus services are wheelchair-accessible and all buses deployed after 2018 have a digital Passenger Information Display System to assist commuters with disabilities. The 2019 Code on Accessibility includes new mandatory requirements that improve the accessibility of toilets and parking lots, among others. We have also made sports more accessible through inclusive gyms and sports programmes under the 2016 Disability Sports Masterplan. To improve access to resources for persons with disabilities and caregivers, the Enabling Guide, a first-stop online disability resource portal, was launched in 2019.

31. Early Intervention (EI). For children aged 0-6 at risk of developmental delays, access to early, targeted support is key to maximising their potential. In 2019, we enhanced subsidies for EI programmes and expanded their coverage to more families. We also introduced two new EI programmes, the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children Under-2s and the Development Support Plus programme, for additional intervention options tailored to the needs of children. In 2019, we also set up a cross-sectoral Inclusive Preschool Workgroup to study

how to better support children with moderate to severe developmental needs within preschools.

32. Children with special educational needs (SEN). Since 2019, Singapore's Compulsory Education Act has been extended to children with moderate to severe SEN born after 1 January 2012, so that these children can be assured the provision of educational settings best suited to their needs. 80% of students with SEN attend government-funded mainstream schools. These students have the cognitive ability and adaptive skills to access the national curriculum and learn in typical classroom settings. They receive support from Allied Educators (Learning and Behavioural Support) and teachers trained in special needs. The remaining 20% of students with SEN (approximately 1.5% of all school-aged children) who require more intensive and specialised assistance attend government-funded Special Education (SPED) schools. These students experience customised curricula and are guided by the use of Individual Education Plans. Specially trained teachers, supported by therapists, psychologists, social workers, and teacher aides form the network of support in SPED schools.

33. Support extends to students with SEN in Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs). Every IHL has a SEN support office which collaborates with academic departments and social services agencies to provide a one-stop support service from pre-enrolment to graduation, including in course counselling, accessibility, funding, and internship support.

34. Promoting employment. SG Enable (a dedicated agency to enable persons with disabilities) encourages employers to establish inclusive business practices, including grants for employee training, workplace modifications, job-design and purchase of assistive technology. The Government also provides wage offsets through the Enabling Employment Credit to support the employment of persons with disabilities. The Job Redesign Guide (2019) helps employers recraft jobs to better suit and integrate employees with disabilities. Interested businesses can take a self-assessment test, the Workplace Disability Inclusive Index, on readiness for inclusive hiring. The Government set up the Enabling Masterplan Workgroup on Preparing Persons with Disabilities for the Future Economy in 2019 to improve the employability of persons with disabilities.

35. Support for lifelong learning. The Government launched two SkillsFuture Study Awards in 2016, for Persons with Disabilities and for Disability Employment Professionals (DEPs), to recognise role models and help them deepen competencies and skillsets.

36. Inclusive consultations. Under the Emerging Stronger Conversations on creating a resilient, post-COVID Singapore, the Government held dedicated virtual engagement sessions in November 2020 with 120 persons with disabilities and other stakeholders in the disability sector, seeking their views on issues ranging from employment, lifelong learning, to raising awareness of disabilities.

5. Trafficked persons (Recommendations 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190)

37. Singapore supported Recommendations 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189 and 190. We have taken decisive action to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) and support and protect victims, including implementing obligations under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

38. A national effort. Effectively countering TIP entails laws, enforcement action and the mobilisation of relevant stakeholders and the community. Through extensive consultations with NGOs, businesses and academics, Singapore developed the National Approach against Trafficking In Persons (2016-2026), charting a “4P” approach to combat TIP.

- a) Prosecuting traffickers. The Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) 2015 is Singapore’s legal framework to combat TIP and enables us to target traffickers operating from overseas. As of September 2020, fifteen persons have been charged under the PHTA, of whom nine were convicted, two were acquitted, and court proceedings for four are ongoing.
- b) Protecting victims. Working with social service agencies, the Government provides food, shelter, medical care, counselling services, and specialised intervention tailored to the circumstances of each victim.
- c) Preventing trafficking. A public that is aware of TIP crimes, and stakeholders trained to identify and deal with TIP crimes, are critical to prevent trafficking and protect victims. The TIP Public Awareness Grant launched in 2016 has encouraged public education initiatives, including a photo exhibition, film screenings, conference for businesses, and a song by a local artiste, that raise awareness of TIP.
- d) Partnering stakeholders. Singapore partners international organisations, such as INTERPOL and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as foreign law enforcement counterparts, to combat trafficking at the global level. To strengthen cooperation with our regional partners, Singapore ratified the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in 2016. Domestically, civil society organisations are invaluable partners in caring for TIP victims, and the buy-in of businesses to adopt responsible sourcing is key to ending demand.

39. Additionally, relevant authorities receive regular and specialised training, locally and overseas, to instil awareness of TIP indicators and develop effective and improved responses to TIP.

6. Elderly persons (Recommendations 105, 128, 129, 216, 217, 221)

40. Singapore supported Recommendations 105, 128, 129, 216, 217 and 221. Singapore is a fast-ageing society. By 2030, one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 and above. Singapore is rebalancing social and economic strategies, including strengthening national healthcare schemes, infrastructure, care facilities and support networks, to empower our seniors to lead active and meaningful lives.

41. Universal retirement savings scheme. Singapore's Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a mandatory social security savings scheme that enables Singaporeans and Permanent Residents to set aside funds for retirement, housing, and healthcare needs. Employers and employees jointly contribute to the employees' CPF accounts. From 2022, CPF contributions for senior workers aged 55 to 70 will gradually increase.

42. Quality and affordable care. In 2020, Singapore introduced a suite of measures to mitigate against the uncertainty of long-term care needs. These include a revamped long-term care insurance scheme, CareShield Life, with significantly enhanced financial protection for severe disability. The national medical savings scheme, MediSave, funded through contributions during employment, will also provide additional funds for severe disability, particularly post-retirement. MediSave cash withdrawal limits will be increased to better aid those with multiple complex chronic conditions. ElderFund helps severely disabled, lower-income Singapore citizens aged 30 and above with long-term care needs.

43. Making care more accessible for seniors. Singapore is doing more to enable our seniors to age comfortably within the community. Since 2015, we have increased home and day care places by 70% to support seniors to age in place, and nursing home bed capacity by 30% for seniors who are frail and have limited family support.

44. We are committed to new, integrated models that enhance care and social inclusion. We are increasing the number of day centres for seniors, including Active Ageing Hubs, and co-located eldercare and childcare facilities in some housing estates. We introduced integrated home and day care services, and will pilot housing models integrated with care services to facilitate independent living for elderly singles.

45. Infrastructure improvements. We continue to build senior-friendly communities through infrastructure enhancements. The Enhancement for Active Seniors programme improves mobility and comfort in seniors' homes. We have

built safer traffic junctions, sheltered link ways and wheelchair-friendly buses. We are also transforming national parks, with the addition of “therapeutic gardens”, to encourage active ageing.

46. Protection of vulnerable adults. The Vulnerable Adults Act (2018) protects vulnerable adults who are incapable of protecting themselves from abuse, neglect, and self-neglect due to physical or mental disability. Amendments to the Mental Capacity Act in 2016 allow professional donees and deputies to make proxy decisions for single elders. We also enhanced protections against abuse or exploitation, by allowing the court to suspend or revoke a donee’s or deputy’s powers in a wider range of circumstances.

7. Lower-income group (Recommendations 216, 220, 224)

47. Singapore supported Recommendations 216, 220 and 224, as we are committed to reducing income disparity and social stratification.

48. ComCare assistance. ComCare is a key component of Singapore’s social safety net. It provides social assistance to low-income households, comprising customised support and a combination of cash and/or in-kind assistance that is responsive to needs. ComCare schemes are funded through interest income generated from the ComCare Endowment Fund, established in 2005 to be a sustainable source of funds to provide social assistance to low-income Singaporeans. The fund currently stands at S\$1.9 billion (US\$1.4 billion), and receives periodic top-ups from the Government. In Financial Year 2019, about S\$151 million (US\$114 million) was disbursed under the various ComCare programmes.

49. Improving employment outcomes. The Progressive Wage Model (PWM) is a wage-skill ladder that maps out career pathways for lower wage workers (LWWs) to support wage increases through skills upgrading. The PWM has been implemented successfully in selected sectors, and will be expanded to more sectors.

50. The Workfare Income Supplement scheme (WIS) tops up salaries and CPF savings of LWWs by up to 30% annually. WIS is primarily targeted at Singaporean workers earning below the 20th percentile. We enhanced the WIS in 2020 to benefit more LWWs and increase payouts. Since 2007, over S\$6.8 billion (US\$5.2 billion) has been disbursed to 890,000 LWWs.

51. The SkillsFuture and Workfare Skills Support schemes support LWWs’ training and incentivise employers to send workers for training. The schemes also provide training allowances for the self-employed and training commitment awards for sustained training.

52. Elderly with lower incomes benefit from the Silver Support Scheme (SSS) in retirement. From 2016 to 2020, SSS paid out S\$1.6 billion (US\$1.2 billion) of quarterly cash supplements to over 200,000 seniors. Since January 2021, the scheme covers one in three elderly Singaporeans and has increased payouts.

53. These interventions have led to LWW wages growing faster than the median workforce wages over the past decade.

8. Education (Recommendations 118, 121, 123, 215, 222)

54. Singapore supported Recommendations 118, 121, 123, 215, and 222. Education for our children and youths, and lifelong learning for adult Singaporeans is a national priority. Some of our efforts have been described in the sections above on children and persons with disabilities.

55. Ensuring affordable access to quality education for all. We believe education is a key social leveller in Singapore. Education is heavily subsidised for Singaporeans. Further, regularly updated financial assistance schemes provide targeted assistance to students from lower-income families, which include full subsidy on school and standard miscellaneous fees and transport subsidies for primary to pre-university levels, as well as free textbooks and uniforms, and school meal subsidies for those in primary and secondary schools. Bursaries are available to students from low-to-middle income families at post-secondary and pre-university levels.

56. A system of support. UPLIFT strengthens the ecosystem of support to empower less-privileged children. Every primary school has a Student Care Centre which provides after-school care including for vulnerable or disadvantaged children, while the majority of secondary schools partner community organisations to provide after-school programmes. We have also strengthened outreach and support for families of these students, together with community agencies.

57. Support for Lifelong Learning. Singapore continues to provide broad-based support to individuals for lifelong learning and skills mastery. Every Singaporean aged 25 and above receives SkillsFuture Credit that can be used for training courses. Mature workers receive enhanced funding support to access training programmes to improve employability. Classroom learning is integrated with structured on-the-job training, through Work-Study Programmes at the diploma, post-diploma and degree-levels. Workshops in the community support individuals seeking training, and there are also dedicated centres offering assistance in job search and training efforts.

9. Healthcare (Recommendations 215, 218, 219)

58. Singapore supported Recommendations 215, 218 and 219. We have achieved universal healthcare coverage for all citizens, anchored on individual responsibility and affordable healthcare for all. The coverage comprises universal health insurance, subsidised healthcare and individual savings in MediSave accounts. Additionally, needy Singaporeans can tap on the MediFund Scheme, a Government endowment fund, for their medical expenses.

59. Universal health insurance. Since 2015, the MediShield Life scheme has provided basic health insurance for all Singaporeans and Permanent Residents against large hospital bills for life, regardless of pre-existing illnesses. Premiums for MediShield Life are subsidised by the Government. In 2020, we introduced CareShield Life for all Singaporeans aged 40 and below, to provide lifetime coverage for their long-term care needs.

60. Expanding regulatory protections. The Healthcare Services Act (2020) enhances safeguards for the safety and well-being of patients, and expands the regulatory framework to allow the licensing of healthcare services provided by a wide spectrum of professions, including allied healthcare professionals, persons providing nursing or rehabilitative care, traditional medicine practitioners, and complementary and alternative medicine practitioners.

61. Growing and improving facilities. Singapore continues to increase capacity in hospitals and long-term care facilities to improve accessibility of healthcare services. From 2015 to 2020, we added six new hospitals, and two national specialist centres for infectious diseases and oral health. We will build five new hospitals by 2030. We continue to expand our network of polyclinics to improve residents' access to holistic medical care closer to home. The Primary Care Networks scheme, launched in 2018, helps private General Practitioner clinics organise themselves into networks to provide more holistic chronic care.

10. Housing (Recommendation 215)

62. Singapore supported Recommendation 215, as home ownership is key in giving our people a tangible stake in our country.

63. Enhanced subsidies. In the last three years, the Government has increased grants to assist Singaporeans overcome challenges in acquiring subsidised housing. First-time buyers receive up to S\$80,000 (US\$60,760) under the Enhanced CPF Housing Grant, in addition to other grants such as the CPF Housing Grant and Proximity Housing Grant (which encourages extended families to live close to each other). Specific attention is paid to low-income families, with measures to help them upgrade to bigger flats. The Step-Up Housing Grant of S\$15,000 (US\$11,400) helps low-income families living in public rental flats purchase two- or three-room flats.

VI. A Cohesive Society

1. Enhancing Social Harmony (Recommendations 109, 112, 115, 116, 117)

64. Singapore supported Recommendations 109, 112, 115, 116, and 117 to enhance social cohesion and harmony in our diverse society. Our challenge is to harness the diversity in ethnicities, cultures, heritages and beliefs to make a collective greater than the sum of its parts.

2. Protecting Racial and Religious Diversity (Recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 111, 113, 119, 120, 152, 153, 198, 199, 203)

65. Singapore continually works to expand the common space among the different racial and religious groups to promote harmonious coexistence and integration, in accordance with the rule of law. We develop this common space early with our young people. In school, children of diverse racial and religious backgrounds get to know and bond with one another through learning and playing together. Through subjects like History, Social Studies, and Character and Citizenship Education in the mainstream school curriculum, and an elective conversational third language, students learn about racial and cultural diversity, common values, issues related to living in multicultural Singapore, ethnic and religious sensitivities, and the importance of racial harmony. Students also participate in Co-Curricular Activities alongside peers from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, commemorate Racial Harmony Day to mark the significance of social cohesion on the anniversary of the 1964 racial riots and participate in school-based celebrations of cultural festivals. Annually, the Ministry of Education (MOE) works with OnePeople.sg (OPSG), a local NGO, to encourage the Primary 4 cohort to identify different ways to promote harmony as part of the Orange Ribbon activity.

66. We ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 2017, and submitted our first State Party report thereafter. Our report (CERD/C/SGP/1) details Singapore's comprehensive approach towards addressing racial discrimination, which also fully implement our ICERD obligations.

67. Reserved Presidential Elections. To improve racial representation in political office, Singapore amended our Constitution in 2016 to introduce a procedure for reserved elections for the office of the President. If no one from a given ethnic community (namely, the Chinese, Malay, Indian or other minority communities) has been President for any of the five most recent Presidential terms, the next Presidential election will be reserved for a candidate from that community. The 2017 election was the first reserved election, and for candidates from the Malay community. Madam Halimah Yacob was elected as our first female President.

68. Effective laws and regulations to deter acts which could stir up racial and religious conflict. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) was amended in 2019 to better combat the growing use of social media to spread hate, and address the threat of foreign influence through religious bodies. The amendments introduced the Community Remedial Initiative (CRI), a voluntary measure through which an individual who has allegedly wounded the feelings of another religious community, may take remedial actions to mend ties with the aggrieved community. If such an individual completes the remedial actions, his case will not be referred for criminal prosecution.

69. Social initiatives. MRHA is complemented by other initiatives that articulate and foster positive social norms and behaviours. These initiatives build mutual trust, respect, understanding, and empathy between communities and prevent segregationist and extremist beliefs and practices from taking root.

70. Commitment to Safeguard Religious Harmony. This Commitment was developed following discussions among local religious leaders with the support of the Government, building upon a 2003 Declaration on Religious Harmony. It emphasises the many positive ways Singaporeans interact across religions and is Singaporeans' unequivocal stand against extremist and segregationist ideologies and practices. As of January 2021, more than 680 religious organisations and 73 community groups such as the Inter-Religious Organisation (formed in 1949 to foster religious harmony) have affirmed the Commitment.

71. The Broadening Racial and Religious Interaction Through Dialogue and General Education (BRIDGE) initiative launched in 2017 encourages frank discussion on sensitive topics, catalyses ground-up movements, and develops capabilities of partners and facilitators to engage on difficult conversations on race and religion. There were 125 BRIDGE activities in 2019, involving over 71,600 participants. These included the Common Senses for Common Spaces (CSCS) interfaith dialogues that provide safe spaces for the community to learn about each others' faith.

72. In 2020, the pandemic saw community partners pivot towards digital engagement of audiences. Key programmes such as OPSG's Regardless of Race dialogues and HarmonyWorks Conference went online and sustained engagement with the community, spurring participants, especially the youth, to take action in promoting racial and religious harmony. Such activities are supported by the Government through the Harmony Fund for projects that promote racial and religious harmony.

73. The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) also launched *Mission: Unite Youth Hackathon* in November 2020. Over 200 participants worked in teams to propose projects to foster social cohesion. Winning projects included a mobile game where gamers role-play characters of a different race, religion or gender, to foster empathy for the lived experiences of others, a user-

generated site to bring different communities together through heritage and culinary trails, and an online platform to encourage and support frank and constructive dialogues on race and religion.

74. The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), with the support of MCCY, organised the inaugural International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) in June 2019. More than 1,100 participants from about 40 countries attended the Conference. This included 100 youth leaders from Singapore, ASEAN and beyond who participated in the Conference's Young Leaders' Programme. The Conference participants shared their experiences, discussed ideas, and rallied all communities to make commitments and take collaborative action to foster social cohesion and interfaith harmony. Singapore plans to organise the second edition of ICCS in 2022-2023.

75. These initiatives have borne fruit. In a 2019 poll by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and OPSG, 70% of Singaporeans felt that people of different religious backgrounds could get along when living together. The same poll found that 97% of respondents felt that there was "moderate" to "very high" levels of racial and religious harmony in Singapore; it also found that inter-racial and inter-religious trust in times of crisis improved between 2013 and 2018.

3. Counter-terrorism (Recommendations 140 and 236)

76. We supported Recommendations 140 and 236. In 2016, Singapore launched the *SGSecure* movement to sensitise, train, and mobilise the community to prevent and deal with a terrorist attack. Everyone is encouraged to Stay Alert to the ever-present threat of terrorism, Stay United during peacetime and in crisis, and Stay Strong after an attack.

77. We have reached out to neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and religious and community organisations to raise awareness, and have equipped individuals and organisations with capabilities, such as improvised first aid, psychological first aid courses and regular lockdown drills. Businesses are encouraged to have risk management plans. In January 2020, the Crisis Preparedness for Religious Organisations Programme was launched to aid religious organisations in implementing security and crisis response plans.

78. The Inter-Agency Aftercare Group (ACG), originally established to provide a range of care services to the families of terrorism-related detainees, has since organised regular counter-ideology forums and symposiums for students. In 2019, ACG organised a youth forum with the theme "*#Youth-nified: Guarding Against Radicalisation in the Digital Era*", attended by 200 students.

79. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), comprising Muslim scholars and teachers, produces online videos to explain why ISIS' ideology goes against Islamic teachings. The RRG's mobile application has a one-on-one in-app chat

function where users can engage RRG counsellors to discuss religious issues, and to receive the RRG's views on current events and latest messages. The RRG also facilitates short talks before Friday sermons, and conducts the Awareness Programme for Youth (APY) to engage Muslim youths and guide them to contextualise Islamic thoughts and practices in a multi-racial and multi-religious society.

80. During the pandemic, the RRG worked with the ACG and the APY alumni to produce online messages, in the form of short videos, motivational quotes in various languages, and infographics for the community. Additionally, the RRG conducted online lectures, 'live' postings, and engagement sessions for the Muslim community, FWs, and the community at large, to raise awareness about the threats of online radicalisation and misinformation.

81. Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Muis), the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, established a compulsory accreditation scheme for Islamic religious teachers and scholars, enabling the Muslim community to ascertain if the religious guidance provided is from qualified Islamic religious teachers and scholars.

82. In July 2017, Muis formed the Asatizah Youth Network (AYN), a group of Singapore millennial religious teachers who focus on engaging Muslim youth to promote positive narratives and counter extremism. AYN members are trained in digital media outreach, counselling, and youth resilience work, to serve as an accessible frontline touch-point. Muis' Student Career and Welfare Office (SCWO) supports Singaporeans studying, or who intend to study at overseas Islamic institutions. SCWO provides them with relevant information on the educational courses and countries of studies, and supports them from pre-departure through to their return to Singapore. SCWO also works with relevant partners and agencies to help our students overseas stay engaged and connected with Singapore, in particular through interactions with Singapore community and religious leaders. Muis also introduced the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies to help returning religious graduates contextualise what they have learnt overseas to Singapore's multi-religious context, and to equip returning graduates with relevant knowledge, skills, and sensitivities to serve as Muslim religious teachers in Singapore.

4. Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law (Recommendation 191)

83. Singapore supported Recommendation 191. Singapore has consistently ranked first in Gallup's Global Law and Order Report from 2014 to 2020. In the World Justice Project (WJP)'s annual Rule of Law Index reports for 2017 to 2020, Singapore was also ranked first for Order and Security, while maintaining its position as one of the top ten jurisdictions for Criminal Justice.

5. Freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of expression (Recommendations 89, 91, 201, 202)

84. Singapore supported Recommendations 89, 91, 201 and 202 because the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression are necessary to facilitate civic participation, democratic process, and increase social cohesion and resilience.

85. Freedom of speech and expression. This is a constitutionally protected right in Singapore. Similar to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Singapore recognises limits to freedom of expression, consistent with international standards.

86. In recent times, democratic societies are being threatened by the global ‘infodemic’ of mis- and dis-information, especially in cyberspace. This erodes societies’ shared infrastructure of fact, undermines democratic discourse, and diminishes the genuine exercise of the right to free speech. These risks are particularly acute in Singapore, which has one of the highest information and communication technology (ICT) penetration rates in the world. Singapore is ranked 3rd in the World Economic Forum’s Networked Readiness Index 2020 for leveraging ICT to promote economic growth and well-being, with 98% of Singapore households having broadband access, and nine in ten Singapore residents having access to a smartphone. Many Singaporeans consume news from Internet and social media, and are plugged into information and perspectives from all over the world. Public discourse in Singapore has also increasingly shifted to cyberspace and social media.

87. Singapore is committed to promoting open and informed discourse that is anchored on facts, while maintaining high levels of civility in our public discourse, especially on sensitive matters such as race and religion. We do so to maintain the mutual respect, tolerance and courtesy among the different groups in Singapore, and to forestall extremism, racism, and xenophobia.

88. In 2018, the Singapore Parliament set up the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods, with cross-bench representation, to study mis- and dis-information and recommend solutions. The Committee received 170 written responses from a wide segment of the public, and conducted public hearings over eight days. The Government has implemented the Select Committee’s recommendations for legislative and non-legislative measures, including through the introduction of the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 (POFMA). POFMA applies to false statements of fact which affect the public interest and allows corrections to be tagged to the falsehood to ensure the latter does not circulate unchecked. People can see both the corrections and falsehoods, and decide for themselves. This adds more facts into online echo chambers where they may not otherwise appear, and helps preserve the broad middle of public discourse and prevent polarisation.

89. POFMA allows the Government to act with speed in the first instance, with a right of appeal to the courts, who are the final arbiters of falsity. During the pandemic, corrections, which have been the primary tool used thus far, were issued within hours against COVID-19 falsehoods. POFMA also mandates binding Codes of Practice for online platforms, to ensure that there are adequate systems and processes in place to prevent and counter the abuse of their platforms.

90. Singapore also amended the POHA in 2019 to strengthen the legal remedies available to individuals and entities who are the subjects of harassing communications, including falsehoods, and allow quick recourse. Doxxing (the publication of personally identifiable information to harass a person) was also criminalised.

91. Freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Singaporeans have a constitutionally protected right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Similar to the freedom of expression, this right is limited, consistent with international standards, to ensure mutual respect amongst our people and broader societal priorities including the need to preserve public order and maintain social harmony in our densely populated city-state.

92. The Speakers' Corner is an established public space for Singaporeans to express their views without the need for a police permit, if certain conditions are met. Peaceful assemblies and processions have been held at the Speakers' Corner since its establishment two decades ago.

Protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Community

93. We firmly oppose discrimination and harassment and have laws to protect all our citizens from such conduct. All Singapore citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation, are free to pursue their activities in their private space. Singapore also takes steps to protect members of the LGBTI community against discrimination. For instance, the Government ensures that persons seeking a job in the civil service are not discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation. POHA also enables victims of harassment to obtain protection orders more easily. Notably, the 2019 MRHA amendments make it an offence to knowingly urge violence against persons and groups on the grounds of religion or religious beliefs. This protection is accorded to both religious groups and non-religious ones, including the LGBTI community.

VII. A Resilient Society

94. In 2019, we celebrated the Singapore Bicentennial – an anniversary that marked the beginning of modern, outward looking and multicultural Singapore. A year later, we faced the greatest challenge of a generation – the pandemic and our worst recession since independence.

95. To tackle the pandemic, we rallied together as a nation. Our overriding consideration was to protect lives. This required a national response in terms of ramping up testing, extensive contact tracing, and building capacity to ensure that our healthcare system had the capacity to treat everyone in Singapore diagnosed with COVID-19.

96. Singapore responded to a joint questionnaire from Special Procedures Mandate Holders (coordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) on 26 June 2020 (available at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/SP/COVID/States/Singapore.docx>) which comprehensively set out our national response to the pandemic (at Annex). We also provided further information on the measures taken to assist persons with disabilities during the pandemic in response to a Joint Communication from selected Special Procedures Mandate Holders. We highlight the broad strokes of Singapore's response below. Beyond the pandemic, Singapore has also taken steps to strengthen the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the longer-term existential issue of climate change.

1. Protecting low-income and vulnerable residents during the pandemic

97. We have put in place social safety nets to provide help where family and community support is inadequate, especially for low-income and vulnerable Singaporeans, including:

- a) Protecting job security. To keep enterprises afloat and preserve jobs during this period of uncertainty due to the pandemic, we introduced schemes to provide cash flow and cost relief. This included the Jobs Support Scheme, which provided employers with co-funding of up to 75% of the first S\$4,600 (US\$3,500) of gross monthly wages paid to local employees for up to a 17-month period. This support was further enhanced during the period of movement restrictions (referred to as “Circuit Breaker” in Singapore) to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- b) Assistance schemes. We implemented various financial assistance schemes to support lower- to middle-income households experiencing job loss, involuntary no pay leave, or significant salary loss, through the Temporary Relief Fund, COVID-19 Support Grant, the Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme and COVID Recovery Grant. In addition, there were specially tailored schemes for employees and self-employed individuals in sectors that were more severely affected or which had peculiar characteristics, e.g. arts and creative sector, tourism-related etc. These schemes were accompanied by broad-based transfers that every Singaporean would receive such as the Solidarity Payment, Solidarity Utilities Credit, and Care and Support Package.

- c) Victims of family violence. During the Circuit Breaker, social services and legal recourse remained available, through the Family Violence Specialist Centres and Family Service Centres; and via video-link applications for protection orders with the courts. Additionally, the Police proactively assessed, contacted and referred persons at risk to social service agencies.
- d) Elderly. Measures have been implemented to safeguard the well-being of our elderly whether at home, or at senior residential care homes, given their vulnerability to serious health complications if infected with COVID-19. We carried out active testing for COVID-19 to better protect the vulnerable and frail elderly, especially those in Care Homes, to detect infections early for treatment and to limit further transmission.

98. Migrant workers. MWs, particularly those living in dormitories, have formed the bulk of Singapore's COVID-19 cases to-date. Our priority has been to take care of MWs and ensure that they remain safe. MWs are extended the same medical care as any Singaporean who contracts COVID-19. For example, Mr Raju, also known as "Case 42", was treated to full recovery after spending nearly five months in hospital, including two months in the intensive care unit (ICU). The full treatment cost was borne by the Government. MWs in dormitories were also provided with free COVID-19 tests and all MWs would be eligible for free COVID-19 vaccinations.

99. An inter-agency task force was quickly mobilised to limit the spread of COVID-19 in dormitories and to support dormitory operators and employers to look after MWs living in dormitories. More than 10,000 workers were moved out into temporary housing facilities to reduce the living density of the dormitories. On-site and regional medical facilities were set-up to ensure that those unwell or displaying symptoms of acute respiratory infections could receive timely medical treatment. Workers staying in the dormitories were provided catered food, reusable masks, care parks, WiFi access and SIM cards so that they could keep in touch with family and friends. A 24/7 "Care Line", operated by volunteer FWs was also set up to support workers' mental health during the pandemic. A public-private taskforce called Project Dawn was set up to develop a comprehensive support ecosystem to manage the mental health of MWs moving forward.

100. Financially, the Government provided levy waivers and rebates to help employers continue to meet their financial obligations to the FWs, despite them not being allowed to work while under isolation or quarantine orders. Employers were required to pay the salaries of FWs staying in dormitories electronically and encouraged to help their FWs remit money back home. Employers in the construction sector were required to submit monthly declarations on the status of salary payment to their foreign employees. The majority paid salaries promptly and TADM helped about 9,000 FWs recover salary arrears between May and August 2020.

101. To allow the FWs to resume work safely, we systematically tested all 300,000 FWs staying in the dormitories. By August 2020, all dormitories were declared cleared of COVID-19. To sustain the efforts to reduce transmission in the dormitories, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) implemented Safe Living Measures to limit intermixing and improve hygiene. FWs staying in dormitories, and workers in the construction, marine and process sectors and personnel who enter the work sites, are required to undergo regular Rostered Routine Testing to allow early detection of new infections. MOM has also developed the FWMOMCare App, which enables FWs to record their health daily and allows them to get prompt medical help via telemedicine if they are unwell.

102. New dormitories will be built to higher standards to strengthen the public health resilience and improve living conditions for FWs. Existing dormitories will be required to transition to higher standards progressively.

103. Singapore's measures to address the impact of COVID-19 on MWs, such as MWs' access to COVID-19 vaccines, the same level of medical care extended to MWs as Singaporeans and the inter-agency task force set up to ensure the well-being of migrants housed in dormitories, were acknowledged and appreciated by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, in his letter of 11 January 2021 to the Government.

2. Economic measures

104. Temporary relief from legal obligations, bankruptcy and insolvency. As the economic impact of the pandemic undermined the ability of individuals and businesses to meet their financial obligations, we introduced the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act to limit the negative economic consequences of the pandemic. For example, the Act provided temporary relief from the commencement and enforcement of certain classes of legal actions for particular types of contracts, against a non-performing party. Bankruptcy and insolvency thresholds were also temporarily raised to protect financially distressed individuals and businesses. The Act also established a panel of assessors who are empowered to grant relief to parties whose contracts were impacted by the pandemic, in a manner that is just and equitable, without the involvement of lawyers. This has provided for an affordable, fast and simple process, to allow all affected parties who meet the criteria for relief to obtain it effectively. A simplified insolvency programme has also been introduced to assist micro and small companies in financial distress to restructure their debts to rehabilitate their business, or to wind up their businesses if their businesses have ceased to be viable.

105. Rental relief. We introduced mandatory rental waivers for small and medium enterprises and non-profit organisations due to their inability to operate normally during the Circuit Breaker period. They were also permitted to defer

payment of rental arrears in accordance with a statutorily prescribed repayment schedule.

106. Tax relief. Income tax payments for self-employed individuals were automatically deferred for three months.

107. National Jobs Council. The National Jobs Council was formed to identify and develop job opportunities and skills training for locals amidst the COVID-19 situation. It includes a dedicated workstream to support the employment of persons with disabilities.

3. Social support

108. Education. Singapore implemented full home-based learning (HBL) in April 2020 for all schools as part of broader national efforts to limit virus transmission. Exceptions were made for students who were children of essential workers, or faced uncondusive home environments for HBL. To ensure all students had continued access to education during HBL, schools loaned computing devices and internet dongles to students who required them.

109. To specifically cater to students with disabilities, teachers adjusted their lessons to engage students and accommodate their needs; caregivers received regular check-ins from school personnel to ensure student well-being. This was done in tandem with the provision of allied health services to address the clinical needs of these students. Since June 2020, all students in Special Education schools are back in school full-time.

110. Mental health assistance. Healthcare institutions and social service agencies in Singapore have maintained the provision of essential mental health support and services with precautionary measures such as remote service delivery where practicable. We have implemented a National CARE Hotline to provide mental health support to individuals struggling during the pandemic, with facilities for further follow-up.

111. Supporting rough sleepers. Since the Circuit Breaker, about 800 persons sleeping rough have been supported by the Government and community partners. These include provision of timely assistance (including financial support, social work intervention, and shelter) to address their needs. Applications for public rental housing were expedited. Partners under the Partners Engaging and Empowering Rough Sleepers Network (PEERS) reach out to rough sleepers to offer shelter and assistance. To meet demand for more shelter spaces, we have worked with PEERS partners to increase shelter spaces.

4. Access to justice

112. During the pandemic, legal assistance for those in need was provided by existing providers such as the Legal Aid Bureau, the Law Society Pro Bono Services and Community Legal Clinics. Services were delivered remotely via video conferencing, email or telephone, where possible.

113. The Judiciary also took steps to provide court services, and continue conduct of hearings. The COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act temporarily facilitated the wider use of remote communication technology in court proceedings. This allowed judges to hear cases remotely, and allowed the taking of evidence remotely. Conditions were imposed to ensure the propriety and fairness of the proceedings, including that the court must not make an order to conduct proceedings remotely if doing so would not allow proceedings to be conducted fairly. Essential and urgent matters continued to be heard by the Courts during the Circuit Breaker period and subsequently, hearings for most cases resumed (either remotely or in person).

5. Access to information

114. In this era of fake news, Singapore's response to COVID-19 has been based on complete transparency. Information on the pandemic was available through multiple reliable channels, including free-to-air television and radio, newspapers, Government websites, social media, digital display panels in public housing estates, and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram. In particular, daily updates were issued in our four national languages through the Government WhatsApp account on information about the virus, new cases, latest Government measures, and the actions individuals should take. For people with disabilities, content on free-to-air television was made accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community by introducing sign language interpretation for live telecasts of key public broadcasts, in addition to the ongoing practice of providing subtitles for selected non-live programmes.

6. Sustainable Development Goals (Recommendation 110)

115. Singapore supported Recommendation 110. Looking beyond the pandemic, as a small nation, we need to continually work on building resilience through measures to strengthen our society. One of the measures that we have undertaken to do is to develop and implement policies that bring Singapore closer to full attainment of the SDGs.

116. Singapore has continually implemented policies for people development under the SDGs. Singapore's Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report submitted to the 2018 High-level Political Forum featured areas of progress in our implementation of all 17 SDGs. Of the 127 applicable targets, Singapore has achieved 59 and 68 are work in progress. Many of the policies implemented are

mentioned in the previous sections of this report, especially those pertaining to SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 16.

7. Climate Change (Recommendation 235)

117. We supported Recommendation 235 to raise awareness of climate change. Singapore designated 2018 the Year of Climate Action to spur nationwide action to tackle climate change. More than 342,000 Singaporeans, business corporations, schools, and CSOs pledged to take climate action and reduce their carbon footprint. Over 800 climate action related events were initiated and organised by organisations from the People, Private and Public (3P) sectors.

118. In 2019, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong called climate change one of the “gravest challenges facing mankind” in his National Day Rally speech, and shared the Government’s comprehensive plans to tackle it. To sustain the momentum for climate action, the Government initiated an annual Climate Action Week during which business corporations, schools, CSOs and youths organised a series of activities to raise awareness of the long-term challenges posed by climate change.

119. In 2020, a year-long campaign was launched calling on Singaporeans to be #ClimateGameChangers, and suggesting simple daily actions everyone could take. Singaporeans also partnered the Government to co-create solutions to improve recycling, reduce the use of disposables, and increase demand for local produce.

120. On 31 March 2020, Singapore submitted its long-term low emissions development strategy (LEDS) document, entitled “Charting Singapore’s Low-Carbon and Climate Resilient Future”, to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The document, prepared by the Government in consultation with academia, industry, and civil society, outlines Singapore’s long-term development priorities and climate action policies, and aims to facilitate its long-term actions to address the effects of climate change and to enable a well-managed transition to a low-carbon economy.

8. Human Rights Treaties (Recommendations 1, 2, 10, 22, 56, 125)

121. Singapore supported Recommendations 1, 2, 10, 22, 56 and 125. Promoting human rights is an ongoing process. We believe that rights and a society’s approach to them evolve over time as they change. We have implemented the Recommendations accepted in our 1st and 2nd UPR. We also periodically review whether to sign on to additional human rights treaties, and are presently party to four of the core human rights treaties.

VIII. Conclusion

122. Despite current and structural challenges, Singapore remains committed to building inclusivity, safeguarding social cohesion, and meeting the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taking stock of our progress against international measures, Singapore ranks:

- a) 12th in the UN's 2020 Human Development Index
- b) 1st for food security and 2nd in the Safe Cities Index, both of the Economist Intelligence Unit
- c) 1st for order and security and 12th overall in the World Justice Project (WJP)'s 2020 Rule of Law Index
- d) 1st of 140 countries for tolerance of ethnic minorities in a 2016 Gallup World Poll
- e) 1st in Save the Children's 2020 End of Childhood Index, and
- f) 12th for gender equality in the 2019 UN Gender Inequality Index.

123. We will not rest on our laurels, and our approach to human rights will continue to evolve, guided by our fundamental goal of ensuring equality, harmony and opportunities for our people.

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**RESPONSE TO JOINT QUESTIONNAIRE BY
SPECIAL PROCEDURE MANDATE HOLDERS (SINGAPORE)**

Introduction

“Today, I want to speak to you directly, to explain where we are, and what may lie ahead... The real test is to our social cohesion and psychological resilience... Let us stay united and resolute...Take sensible precautions, help one another, stay calm, and carry on with our lives.” – Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at his first nationwide address on COVID-19, 8 February 2020

1. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Singapore Government has taken human-centred social and economic measures to ensure that the health, livelihoods and human rights of all our citizens and residents are adequately protected. This document provides an overview of the policies that the Singapore Government has put in place to ensure that no one in our population is left behind in the fight against COVID-19.
2. The key milestones of Singapore’s fight against COVID-19, which lend context to the measures detailed below, are as follows:
 - (i) From January 2020 to 6 April 2020: As cases of local transmission emerged, Singapore implemented travel restrictions and safe distancing measures.
 - (ii) From 7 April to 1 June 2020: Singapore entered the “Circuit Breaker” period, which was approximately two months of enhanced safe distancing measures to slow local transmission of COVID-19. Schools were closed and moved to Home-Based Learning (HBL), and physical workplace premises were also closed, save for those providing essential services and those in critical economic sectors.
 - (iii) From 2 to 18 June 2020: Singapore moved to Phase One of the post-“Circuit Breaker” period (“Safe Re-Opening”), with gradual re-opening of economic activities that did not pose a high risk of transmission, while social, economic and entertainment activities with a higher risk of transmission remained closed.
 - (iv) From 19 June to Present: Singapore is in Phase Two of the post- “Circuit Breaker” period (“Safe Transition”), with more activities such as in-restaurant dining, use of public sports facilities, and retail services resuming. The economy will progressively re-open, subject to safe management measures being in place.

- (v) The third and final stage of Singapore’s phased reopening (“Safe Nation”) where there will be a “new normal” with the resumption of social, cultural, religious and business gatherings and events. This Phase is envisioned to last until an effective vaccine or treatment is developed.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups

- 3. Under Singapore’s social compact, the Government ensures access to health services, affordable basic services, creates opportunities for growth, and provides institutional support for individuals and their families. Focussing on low-income and vulnerable residents particularly Singaporeans, the Government has put in place social safety nets to provide help where family and community support is inadequate.

Lower to Middle Income Families

- 4. Cognisant of the impact on jobs and job security during the “Circuit Breaker” period, the Government stepped up measures to keep enterprises afloat and preserve jobs. These assistance schemes include:
 - (i) the **Jobs Support Scheme**,² which co-funds between 25 – 75% of the first S\$4,600 of gross monthly wages paid to local employees for a 10-month period;³
 - (ii) the **Temporary Relief Fund**⁴ which provided immediate financial help with basic living expenses in April 2020 for lower to middle-income Singaporeans who were retrenched or suffered substantial loss of personal income;
 - (iii) the **COVID-19 Support Grant** for citizens and permanent residents who involuntarily lost their jobs, were placed on involuntary No-Pay-Leave or are experiencing at least 30% loss of monthly salary;

² For more information, please refer to www.iras.gov.sg/irashome/Schemes/Businesses/Jobs-Support-Scheme--JSS-/.

³ To support the arts and culture sector, the Government set aside S\$55 million for an Arts and Culture Resilience Package (ACRP) (www.nac.gov.sg) to protect the arts ecosystem, provide support and opportunities for arts organisations and artists, as well as develop longer-term capabilities for the post COVID-19 recovery period. Under the Job Support Scheme, the Government co-funds at least 50% of the first S\$4,600 of gross monthly wages paid to each local employee in the arts and culture sector through cash subsidies.

⁴ Detailed information on the schemes at (ii) to (iv) can be found at www.gov.sg/article/financial-support-to-help-Singaporeans-affected-by-covid-19 and www.msf.gov.sg/assistance/Pages/covid19relief.aspx

- (iv) the **Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme**⁵ to assist self-employed Singaporeans with less means and family support to tide over this period of extraordinary economic uncertainty; and
 - (v) a six-month extension of assistance in **ComCare**,⁶ Singapore’s national social assistance scheme.
5. The above schemes are accompanied by financial transfers to every Singaporean, including a one-off cash pay-out from the **Care and Support package, Solidarity Payment**, and the **Solidarity Utilities Credit**.⁷

Victims of Domestic Violence

6. To support those at risk of domestic violence during the “Circuit Breaker” period, social services and legal recourse remained available, through the Family Violence Specialist Centres, Family Service Centres, and Crisis Shelters, and via video-link applications for Personal Protection Orders with the Family Justice Courts.⁸ In tandem with this, the Singapore Police Force (“Police”) enhanced its responses to domestic violence cases by proactively assessing and referring victims at risk of further violence to social service agencies, contacting victims to find out if they required further assistance, and referring offenders to social workers who would assess whether social intervention was required to break the offending cycle.⁹

Persons with Disabilities

7. While stringent measures are in place to ensure safe distancing measures are complied with, there is operational flexibility in the enforcement of the compulsory wearing of face masks for persons with disabilities and special needs. If assistance is required, the Police refers persons with disabilities to specialised agencies, like Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).¹⁰

Older Persons

⁵ For more information, please refer to www.ntuc.com.sg/sirs

⁶ For more information, please refer to www.msf.gov.sg/Comcare/Pages/Public-Assistance.aspx

⁷ For more information, please refer to www.singaporebudget.gov.sg/budget_2020/budget-measures/

⁸ Options for advice and assistance on family violence are available at www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Family-Violence/Pages/default.aspx

⁹ Additional information is available at: www.police.gov.sg/Media-Room/News/20200514_OTHERS_Enhancing_Police_Response_To_Combat_Family_Violence

¹⁰ For more information, please refer to www.aic.sg

8. The Government recognises that older persons are at higher risk of developing serious health complications if infected with COVID-19. Measures have been implemented to safeguard the well-being of our elderly residents whether at home, or at senior residential care homes (“Care Homes”).¹¹ Older persons are advised to stay at home as much as possible and are encouraged to use online alternatives for essential services, such as tele-health, digital transactions, and food deliveries. The Silver Generation Office (SGO) under the AIC provides support to about 47,000 vulnerable senior citizens, by monitoring their well-being and helping them run simple errands. As social isolation is the unfortunate by-product of safe distancing, the SGO also refers senior citizens to relevant support services, including befriending services for those who need a listening ear.
9. The Government carries out active testing for COVID-19 for the especially vulnerable and frail members of the elderly population, especially those in Care Homes. This ensures that any infections are detected as early as possible for treatment and to limit further transmission.

Migrant Workers

10. The Government’s priority has been to ensure that migrant workers remain safe and that the number of infected workers, severe cases and COVID-19-related deaths are kept to a minimum. Any migrant worker tested positive is given the same medical care extended to Singaporeans, with costs covered by the Government. Most have had mild symptoms and are on the path to recovery. The Government has worked to ensure that the livelihoods of migrant workers are protected, and that they continue to be paid their salaries. At the beginning of the “Circuit Breaker” period, an Inter-Agency Task Force (ITF) was set up as part of a whole-of-government response to provide comprehensive support for migrant workers in three phases.
11. **Phase One** of the ITF’s work was completed within the first week, by providing for the immediate needs of migrant workers that reside in 43 Purpose-Built Dormitories (PBDs). An effective safe distancing regime was established where educational materials were provided to workers and their employers, basic conditions were improved, and meals and care packs were provided to the workers:
 - (i) **Provision of Meals/Goods:** The ITF ensured that meal runs were organised for Muslim residents observing Ramadan. To date, over 10 million meals have been served. Residents can also purchase items from the dormitory mini-marts through online orders and delivery of goods.

¹¹ For more information, please refer to www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/support-measures-for-seniors-during-COVID-19 and www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/post-circuit-breaker-measures-for-seniors

More than 410,000 care packs containing daily essentials such as thermometers, hand sanitisers and masks have also been distributed.

- (ii) **Connectivity Services:** WIFI access is available across all dormitories and more than 300,000 data SIM cards have been distributed to workers. More than 300 free movie channels are also available.
 - (iii) **Payment of Salaries and Remittances:** The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has engaged employers to ensure that workers are paid their salaries punctually and mandated that this be done electronically as dormitories had been gazetted as isolation areas. Migrant worker levies for employers have been waived and levy rebates have been provided, which will enable employers to retain workers in their employment where necessary. For employers facing financial difficulties, the Migrant Workers' Assistance Fund stepped in to provide relief.¹² To ensure migrant workers at all dormitories have access to remit money back to their families, MOM works closely with banks and remittance agents to set up temporary manned remittance booths, deploy self-service kiosks, and provide guidance on using e-remittance in the migrant workers' native languages.
12. **Phase Two** of the ITF's work involved the provision of strong medical support for dormitory residents, with forward deployed medical teams and improved access to medical services, including the use of telemedicine. For PBDs housing around 200,000 workers, medical facilities were set up on-site to ensure that unwell workers or those displaying symptoms of acute respiratory infections could receive appropriate and timely medical treatment. Additional medical posts were set up at Factory-Converted Dormitories housing around 65,000 workers.
13. **Phase Three** of the ITF's work is ongoing, and involves housing recovered workers in suitable accommodation and minimising the risks of recurring transmissions. The ITF has stepped up care for workers in the most affected dormitories by setting up onsite Community Care Facilities (CCFs) to house COVID-19-positive patients who are clinically well or display mild symptoms. Patients are moved to the CCFs almost immediately after diagnosis, instead of waiting to be transferred to an off-site medical facility. Once patients are no longer infectious, they are transferred out of the CCFs to onsite Community Recovery Facilities (CRFs) which ensure safe recovery within the dormitories. The Singapore Government will implement a programme to build additional dormitories over the coming months to reduce the current density of existing dormitories.

¹² For more information, please refer to www.mwc.org.sg/wps/portal/mwc/home/getinvolved/donate/

Workers in the Food Industry

14. Workers employed in the food industry are particularly vulnerable and need to be protected from COVID-19, as they perform an essential service in ensuring that food can continue to be produced and supplied to support Singapore's daily needs. The Government has therefore provided guidance to operators of food establishments on good practices in food hygiene, sanitation and personal hygiene, and implementation of safe distancing measures to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.¹³ Fishery ports, wholesale centres, slaughterhouses and markets remain open, and safe distancing measures have been similarly put in place to protect personnel and patrons.
15. With the intention of encouraging the public to minimise visits to crowded areas during the outbreak, the Government facilitated the supply of food to consumers by facilitating interim business models. Special temporary licenses were issued to food establishments to allow the sale of shelf-stable food via food trucks in the neighbourhoods. Social agencies also facilitated the delivery of groceries and meals to more vulnerable persons. The Government also provided regular and timely updates to maintain public confidence in our food security strategies and discourage hoarding behaviour.

Economic Measures

Temporary Relief from Legal Obligations, Insolvency and Bankruptcy

16. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented economic impact. Supply chain disruptions and manpower shortages, among others, have undermined the ability of individuals and businesses to fulfil contractual obligations and rendered them vulnerable to actions for damages and the forfeiture of deposits. Otherwise stable businesses may now face insolvency. As a complement to the Resilience Budget (see section below), the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act seeks to address and limit these negative economic consequences. **Part 2** of the Act provides temporary relief from stipulated types of legal action for the inability to perform certain contracts that were entered into before 25 March 2020 and where the contractual obligations are to be performed on or after 1 February 2020. Relief applies where a party's inability to perform a contract is, to a material extent, caused by a COVID-19 event. The period of relief will be for six months in the first instance, from 20 April 2020 to 19 October 2020, but may be extended by a further six months. Contracts covered under Part 2 include:
 - (i) Leases and licenses for non-residential property;
 - (ii) Construction and supply contracts;

¹³ For more information, please refer to www.sfa.gov.sg/covid-19/

- (iii) Event and tourism-related contracts;
 - (iv) Certain secured loan facilities granted by banks and finance companies to Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs);
 - (v) Hire-purchase and conditional sales agreement for plant or machinery used for commercial purposes or commercial vehicles; and
 - (vi) Options to purchase granted by housing developers, and sale and purchase agreements between housing developers and purchasers, for residential property.
17. On 5 June 2020, Singapore’s Parliament passed a Bill to amend the Act¹⁴ (“the Amendment Bill”), introducing additional legal safeguards to cushion the impact of the accumulated payments at the end of the prescribed period for prescribed contracts covered by the Act, by providing that late payment interest or charges under such contracts will be capped at a prescribed rate. A Panel for Assessors for COVID-19 Temporary Relief (PACT) has also been appointed to resolve disputes arising from application of the Act.¹⁵ **Part 3** of the Act temporarily increases thresholds and time limits for bankruptcy and insolvency for financially distressed individuals and businesses by increasing the monetary threshold for bankruptcy and corporate insolvency to S\$60,000 and S\$100,000 respectively. The Act also lengthens the statutory period for parties to respond to demands from creditors and temporarily relieves directors of their obligations to prevent their companies from trading while insolvent, if the debts are incurred in the company’s ordinary course of business.

Rental Relief

18. As SMEs and non-profit organisations (NPOs) see a significant reduction in their revenues and takings as a result of COVID-19, they require additional and immediate relief from their rental obligations during the “Circuit Breaker” period. Under the Amendment Bill passed on 5 June 2020, a legislative framework for the fair and equitable handling of rental obligations was introduced. The Amendment Bill introduced mandatory rental waivers for SME and NPO tenants and sub-tenants, requires landlords to provide additional rental waivers for eligible SME and NPO tenants who are substantially impacted by COVID-19 and gives eligible SME and NPO tenants the ability to defer payment of rental arrears that have accrued during the prescribed period in accordance with a statutory repayment schedule, with interest capped at a prescribed rate.

¹⁴ [www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/covid-19-\(temporary-measures\)-\(amendment\)-bill-28-2020.pdf](http://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/covid-19-(temporary-measures)-(amendment)-bill-28-2020.pdf)

¹⁵ www.mlaw.gov.sg/news/press-releases/2020-04-20-covid-19-temporary-measures-act-provisions-relating-to-temporary-reliefs-to-commence-on-20-April-2020

Tax Reform

19. During this period of uncertainty, the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), as tax administrator, continues to extend assistance to taxpayers who may need help. Among others, income tax payments for self-employed individuals from May to June 2020 have automatically been deferred for three months, while taxpayers facing financial difficulties may apply for a longer tax payment plan online.¹⁶

Supply Chain Resilience & Access to Food

20. Singapore imports more than 90% of our food from more than 170 countries and regions, making supply chain resilience a cornerstone of our COVID-19 response. While our diversified range of sources has helped to minimise the impact of disruptions on international supply chains, there are still challenges given the drop in overall freight frequency (via sea and air).
21. To this end, Singapore launched a Joint Ministerial Statement (JMS) with Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Uruguay, and the UAE that affirmed our commitment to supply chain connectivity amidst the COVID-19 situation. Singapore and New Zealand also set out a Declaration on Trade in Essential Foods for Combatting the COVID-19 Pandemic. This Declaration commits both Singapore and New Zealand, amongst other things, to expedite the release of essential goods, including medical, pharmaceutical, agriculture and food products, upon arrival. These efforts contribute to supply chain connectivity and a continued supply of food for Singapore and the world.
22. The COVID-19 situation also underscored the importance of local food production which can serve as a buffer during supply disruptions. To further strengthen food security, the Government has sought to further diversify our food import sources, stockpile key food items, and expedite efforts to ramp up local food production. The Government has also been investing in R&D to raise agriculture productivity in Singapore.

Social Support

Mental and Physical Health

23. To support the emotional and psychological welfare of all Singaporeans who may be susceptible to additional stress during the pandemic, the Government has

¹⁶ Additional information is available at www.iras.gov.sg/irashome/COVID-19-Support-Measures-and-Tax-Guidance/Support-Measures/Resilience-Budget--Solidarity-Budget-and-Fortitude-Budget/

implemented a 24/7 National CARE Hotline to provide emotional support.¹⁷ Individuals who require further assistance will be referred to appropriate agencies for follow-up. Healthcare institutions and social service agencies in Singapore have also maintained the provision of essential mental health support and services with precautionary measures such as remote service delivery where it is possible and within safe distancing measures.

24. Arts and culture lift our spirits in these difficult times and sustain our emotional well-being. To ensure Singaporeans have access to the arts and culture during COVID-19, the Government is promoting digitalisation of the arts and culture through the Digitalisation Fund.¹⁸ This includes a Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts (DPG) which supports efforts by arts and culture groups and practitioners, including the self-employed and arts educators, to present their work in digital form during COVID-19. The grant has created work opportunities for arts practitioners, developed industry capabilities in producing digital arts content, and supported continued access to arts and culture for Singaporeans during COVID-19. The Fund also supports commissioned works and partnerships such as the digital presentation of key festivals and events like the Singapore Heritage Festival and Singapore Art Week. Museum exhibitions and collections have also been made accessible through virtual platforms.
25. During the “Circuit Breaker” period, public and private sports facilities were closed to minimise the transmission of COVID-19. Nevertheless, residents could exercise in the open, albeit with safety measures in place, such as running alone, observing safe distancing, and putting on a mask after exercising. The national sports agency, Sport Singapore, concurrently launched ActiveSG Circle,¹⁹ a virtual platform that connects private fitness instructors and freelancers with its 1.6 million subscribers, for virtual workout sessions.

Education

26. During the pandemic, the Government remains committed to providing children with a well-rounded education. Our education system has additional provisions for vulnerable students, including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities, and those from disadvantaged families.
27. Singapore implemented full HBL for all schools during the “Circuit Breaker” as part of our efforts to enhance safe distancing measures. Students who faced uncondusive environments at home for HBL or had parents who were essential

¹⁷ For more information, see www.gov.sg/article/call-these-helplines-if-you-need-emotional-or-psychological-support

¹⁸ For more information, see [www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/press-statements/2020/apr/\\$55-million-arts-culture-resilience-package](http://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/press-statements/2020/apr/$55-million-arts-culture-resilience-package) and www.a-list.com.sg.

¹⁹ For more information, please refer to www.circle.myactivesg.com/landing

workers and unable to make alternative care arrangements were allowed to continue learning in school, under the supervision of their teachers.

28. To support students' well-being, teachers checked in on students regularly and referred them to school counsellors when necessary. Schools also loaned out computing devices and internet dongles to students who required them for HBL but did not have access to these devices. For primary and secondary school students on the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS), meal subsidises were extended regardless of whether they returned to school during the full HBL period. From 2 June 2020, most mainstream students adopted a blended learning approach, rotating between weekly HBL and returning to school for lessons, for a period.²⁰
29. Special arrangements were made to support students in Special Education (SPED) schools. While SPED schools also implemented full HBL, caregivers received daily check-ins from school personnel. This was done in tandem with the provision of allied health services implemented on a systematic and incremental basis, to address the clinical needs of students with SEN and disabilities during the "Circuit Breaker" period. All SPED school students returned to school from 8 June 2020, as these students benefit more from face-to-face interactions with teachers and are less able to access HBL independently. Regardless, all schools have put in place enhanced safe management measures.

Access to Justice

30. The Ministry of Law and its partners continue to provide legal assistance during the pandemic, through existing measures such as the Legal Aid Bureau²¹, the Law Society Pro Bono Services²² and Community Legal Clinics²³. Services are delivered remotely via video conferencing, email or telephone, where possible. The public can also access various online tools that provide useful legal information understandable to the layman.²⁴
31. The Judiciary has also taken steps to ensure that court services and hearings remain largely available and uninterrupted while reducing person-to-person contact. In that regard, it is assisted by Part 5 of the COVID-19 (Temporary

²⁰ For more information, please refer to www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/arrangements-for-schools-and-institutes-of-higher-learning-at-the-end-of-circuit-breaker and www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/arrangements-for-schools-and-institutes-of-higher-learning-in-phase-two

²¹ For more information, please refer to www.lab.mlaw.gov.sg

²² For more information, please refer to www.lawsocprobono.org/Pages/default.aspx

²³ A list of legal clinics is available at www.legalclinics.sg.

²⁴ One such resource is the "Know the Law" handbook, which is accessible at www.lawsocprobono.org/Documents/Know%20the%20Law%20NOW-FINAL.pdf.

Measures) Act²⁵, passed by Parliament on 7 April 2020 upon the commencement of the “Circuit Breaker” period. Among other matters, the Act temporarily facilitates the wider use of remote communication technology in court proceedings by allowing (i) judges to hear cases remotely; (ii) accused persons to make an appearance or give evidence remotely; and (iii) witnesses/experts in Singapore or elsewhere to give evidence remotely. The expanded use of remote communication technology in court proceedings is also subject to conditions specified under the Act, in order to ensure the propriety and fairness of the proceedings. These include the giving of evidence only via live video or live television link, while accused persons may only appear or give evidence remotely from a place within a court or a prison in Singapore.

32. During the “Circuit Breaker” period, all matters scheduled for hearing were adjourned to a date to be fixed, unless the matter was assessed to be essential and urgent²⁶. Such matters were then heard via remote communication technology. Despite movement restrictions, the Family Justice Courts were able to hear about a third of their caseload (more than 2,400 cases), which was facilitated by the setting up of “Zoom rooms” in two locations for the use of unrepresented litigants.
33. Hearings for most cases resumed during Phases One and Two of the post-“Circuit Breaker” period, through the use of video and teleconferencing and the implementation of safe distancing and other appropriate measures for hearings involving physical attendance. The Supreme Court did not enter its usual recess in June 2020 to facilitate the disposal of matters that have accumulated. The State Courts and the Family Justice Courts likewise continued to hear matters in June 2020.

Transparency of Communication

34. In the era of fake news, Singapore’s response to COVID-19 has been based on complete transparency. Through the Gov.sg WhatsApp account, the Government issued daily updates in four languages – on our knowledge of the virus, new cases, latest Government measures, and the actions that individuals should take at various stages of the “Circuit Breaker” and post- “Circuit Breaker” phases.²⁷
35. Information is available through multiple reliable channels, including free-to-air television and radio, newspapers, government websites, social media, digital display panels in public housing estates, and social media applications such as

²⁵ A copy of the Act is available at [www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/covid-19-\(temporary-measures\)-bill-19-2020.pdf](http://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/covid-19-(temporary-measures)-bill-19-2020.pdf).

²⁶ For more information, please refer to www.supremecourt.gov.sg/news/media-releases/supreme-court--state-courts-and-family-justice-courts-to-hear-only-essential-and-urgent-matters-from-7-april-to-4-may-2020. The list of essential and urgent matters are set out in **Schedule 1** of the Registrar’s Circular No. 4 of 2020.

²⁷ Please refer to www.gov.sg/article/govsg-on-whatsapp. The platform currently has over one million subscribers.

WhatsApp and Telegram. Recognising that people with disabilities may need additional support, content on free-to-air television is made accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community by introducing sign language interpretation for live telecasts of key public broadcasts (e.g. key Government announcements related to COVID-19). This is in addition to the ongoing practice of providing subtitles for non-live programmes.

Improving Digital Literacy

36. The pandemic has also brought to the fore the importance of having a digitally inclusive system, at a time when many have had to adapt to learning, working, interacting and transacting online. The Infocomm Media Development Authority's (IMDA) Home Access (HA) and NEU PC Plus (NPP) programmes subsidise Internet connectivity and one digital device for every low-income household.²⁸ Given the rapid switch to full HBL, the NPP scheme was enhanced to subsidise more computers for households with school-going children and the application process was streamlined to hasten the provision of assistance to those in need. Senior-specific digital literacy initiatives have also been launched. IMDA's IMSilver portal²⁹ provides resources aimed at helping seniors learn how to use digital and mobile technologies effectively, while the recently launched SG Digital Office helps all seniors build their digital capabilities and widen their horizons through digital adoption.³⁰

Preventing Racial Discrimination

37. Our existing legal framework against racial and religious discrimination remains robust during the pandemic. Under the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Penal Code, individuals or groups attempting to promote racial and religious disharmony, and cause societal conflict face strict penalties. Among others, it is an offence to utter words with the deliberate intent to wound the racial or religious feelings of any person, or to knowingly promote, through words, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious or racial groups.³¹

Conclusion

²⁸ For more information, please refer to www.imda.gov.sg/programme-listing/home-access and www.imda.gov.sg/programme-listing/neu-pc-plus

²⁹ For more information, please refer to www.imsilver.imda.gov.sg

³⁰ For more information, please refer to www.imda.gov.sg/infocomm-media-landscape/SG-Digital-Office

³¹ Sections 298 and 298A, Penal Code (Cap. 224, 2008 Rev Ed). See also Part III, Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Cap 167A, 2001 Red Ed).

38. The world has undergone an upheaval with COVID-19, and Singapore has not been immune to its consequences. The Government has taken on the challenge to rapidly and effectively adapt and put in place measures that will guide the country through the pandemic and on to the path of recovery – both socially and economically. As we head into a new normal, we will continue to shape our response to the benefit of all in Singapore.

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