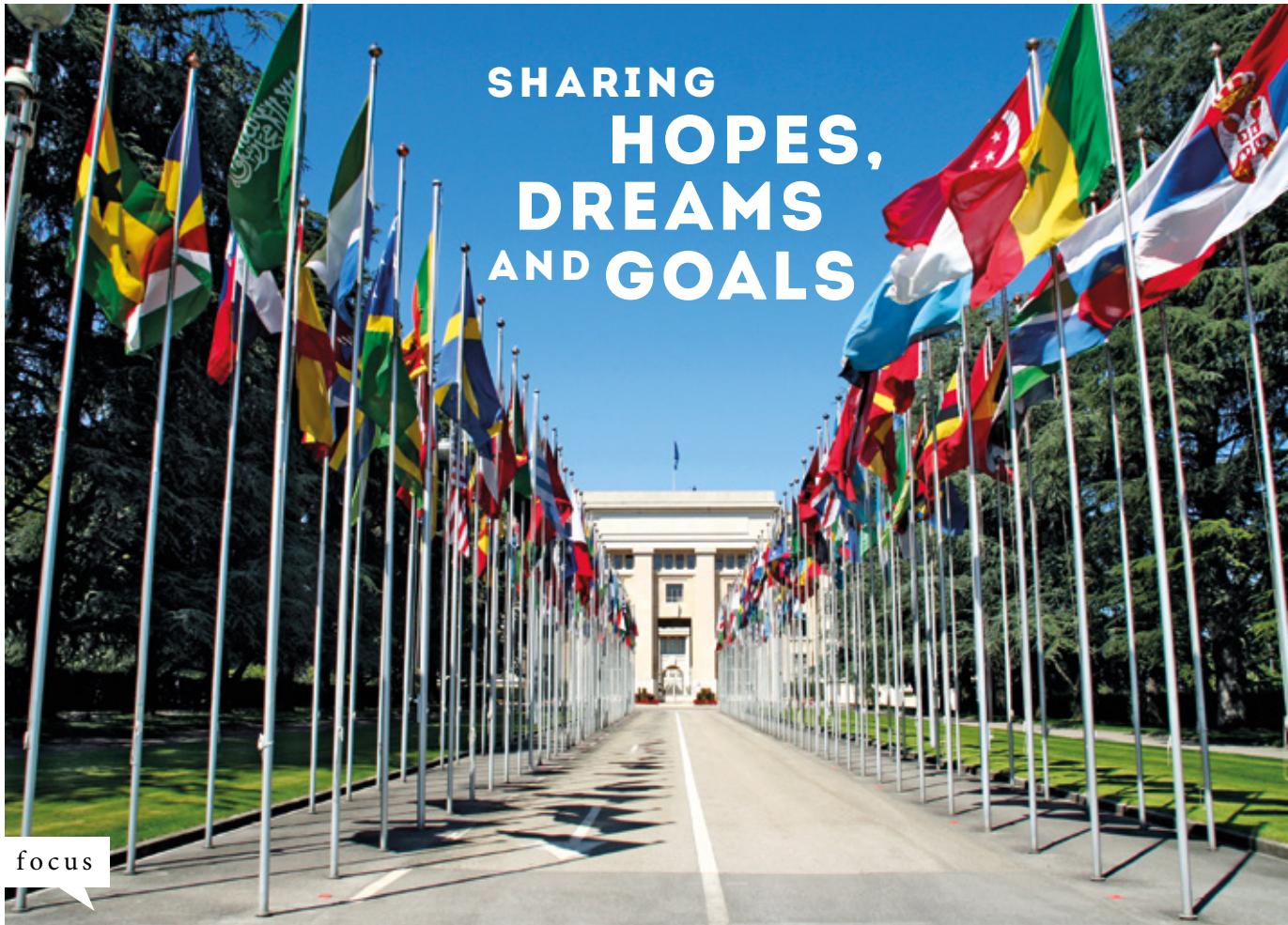


# experience **SINGAPORE**



ISSUE  
71

A look at Singapore's relationship with the UN as the international body marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

# ED'S NOTE

Dear readers,

The COVID-19 pandemic is the crisis of our generation. As borders closed and people were forced to endure physical separation from friends, colleagues and families, a pandemic of this nature also showed us how interconnected the world is today. What is bad for one, can quickly become disastrous for all. It is only through the sharing of ideas, resources and technology that countries can hope to make progress and safeguard their collective future. We are all invested in human ingenuity and scientific innovation. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

This issue of *Experience Singapore* examines Singapore's commitment to this common endeavour as the United Nations (UN) celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As a small multicultural nation with limited resources, its leaders realised early on the importance of multilateralism from its birth. Our Focus story (pages 3-5) looks at Singapore's close relationship with the UN. Singapore has also made its mark on international law, with the Singapore Convention on Mediation coming into effect earlier this year (pages 10-11). Closer to home, Singapore's bid for its hawker culture to be inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage is ongoing. Learn more about Singapore's hawker phenomenon and the quest to obtain the international recognition it deserves (pages 8-9).

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the opportunities for exchange, the Singapore Cooperation Programme has leveraged technology to overcome distances and keep the spirit of open communication alive (pages 6-7). Through sharing and giving, Singapore seeks to do its part to help humanity progress as one.

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Ms Sharon Ong, the Ministry of Law's Director-General (International & Advisory), reflects on the journey



Acting Director  
Strategic Communications Directorate  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

### KEEP IN TOUCH!

Share with us your memories, photos and experiences in Singapore under the Singapore Cooperation Programme. Email us at mfa@mfa.sg



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## experience SINGAPORE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE SINGAPORE COOPERATION PROGRAMME



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SINGAPORE

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focus

# AN ENDURING PARTNERSHIP

**Singapore's relationship with the United Nations as it marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.**

**Without a doubt,** the vast General Assembly hall at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York City is the world's largest diplomatic arena. This melting pot of languages and cultures sees officials from all over the world rubbing shoulders as they discuss everything from climate change to cybersecurity.

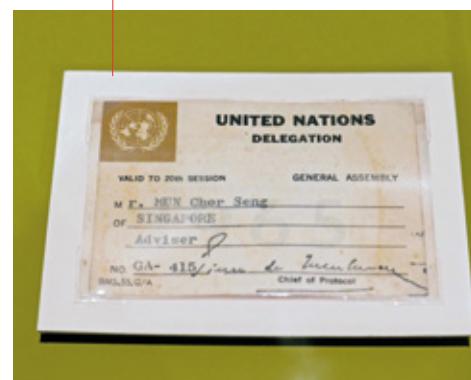
While the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily halted much of the physical bustle, it has highlighted the importance of the UN, an international organisation comprising 193 member states. As the UN marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, its legitimacy, convening power and normative impact have been key to its accomplishments. These will remain crucial in helping the world overcome pressing challenges of the day such as the ongoing pandemic.

## GIVING SUPPORT, A VOICE AND A STAKE FOR SINGAPORE

Speaking at the High-Level Meeting to commemorate the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted the role of the UN in giving small states like Singapore a voice, and a stake in the global commons. "For all its limitations, it has helped to level the playing field for all countries," he said, adding that Singapore's relationship with the UN began 55 years ago, shortly after it gained independence.

Singapore was admitted to the UN as its 117<sup>th</sup> member in 1965, a moment that Mr Mun Chor Seng remembers like it happened yesterday. Now 82, Mr Mun was a young cameraman with the then-Radio and Television Singapore, who had accompanied the Singapore delegation — led by its first Foreign

AS A YOUNG CAMERAMAN, MR MUN CHOR SENG DOCUMENTED SINGAPORE'S ADMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN 1965. SEEN HERE IS HIS DELEGATION CARD, WHICH GAVE HIM ACCESS TO THE HISTORIC CEREMONY.



Minister Mr S Rajaratnam — to its admission ceremony in September 1965. "It was a long journey to the United Nations," he recalled, noting that the delegation stopped over in Hong Kong and San Francisco on their way to New York City. "But it was worth it when

"SINGAPORE IS COMMITTED TO THE FUTURE OF THE UN, AND THE VALUES AND IDEALS OF THE UN CHARTER," SAID PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEH LOONG AT A COMMEMORATION CEREMONY OF THE 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

we saw Singapore's flag being raised alongside those of other member states from across the world."

The Republic's decision to join the global rules-based multilateral system proved to be a game-changer: Singapore was able to tap on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to secure much-needed funds and expertise to power and steer its fledgling economy. At its peak, some 104 experts — from fields as diverse as labour development and transport — visited the Lion City to extend a helping hand. Meanwhile, the value of projects funded by the UNDP grew from US\$0.3 million in 1966 to US\$2.5 million in 1972. These contributions were key to Singapore's economic growth in the immediate years following independence. Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew commented in 1992 that the "UNDP (had) played a very important role in establishing Singapore".

Other UN agencies that were key to Singapore's success included the World Bank Group, which provided the



Republic 14 loans between 1963 and 1975. These loans supercharged growth and development in several sectors, ranging from port expansion and sewage management, to education and power generation.

SINGAPORE'S FLAG BEING HOISTED AT THE CEREMONY MARKING ITS ADMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN 1965.



## STRONGER TOGETHER



### Facts about THE FORUM OF SMALL STATES (FOSS)

#### WHAT

An informal platform at the United Nations that brings together states with populations under 10 million to discuss issues of common interest.

#### WHO

108 member states.

#### ACTIVITIES

Since its launch in 2015, the FOSS Fellowship Programme has worked to foster closer cooperation among member states through the exchange of views and experiences on issues faced by small states in their development journeys.

#### PLAYING ITS PART

As Singapore's economy strengthened, it relied less on financial aid from the UNDP and gradually made the transition from being a beneficiary to a benefactor. By 1985, Singapore had provided 66 experts and offered 653 fellowships to the UN system, as well as US\$3.23 million to UNDP projects. The assistance and development that UNDP provided Singapore with had kickstarted a constructive cycle of mutual growth.

Mr Rajaratnam alluded to this cycle in his speech marking Singapore's admission to the UN. "Though we are a small country not endowed with ample natural resources and though we cannot be counted among the highly-advanced nations of the world, we are nevertheless a highly-urbanised community that has acquired experience and knowledge which we are prepared to share with others in the regional cooperation schemes organised by the agencies of the UN. Undoubtedly, these offers of assistance



COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, SINGAPORE

can be carried out only on a modest scale, but if we obtain help from others, we must be ready to help others as much in return," he said.

Singapore continues to lend its expertise and support to other nations through partnerships with the UN. In 2013, Singapore's Building and Construction Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme established a five-year partnership project titled "NAMA Development for the Building Sector in Asia", to help four Southeast Asian countries develop plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their building and construction industries. These have helped various sectors in beneficiary states, including accelerating the development of energy-efficient social housing and government buildings.

### A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The world in 2020 is vastly different from the one in 1965 when Singapore joined the UN. Recent years have been plagued by growing isolationism, protectionism and unilateralism. This has been accompanied by mounting pushback against multilateral institutions and international cooperation. These policies, coupled

Singapore is committed to the future of the UN, and the values and ideals of the UN Charter.

We are equally determined to work with all countries, including through the Forum of Small States which we helped to establish, to strengthen the UN.

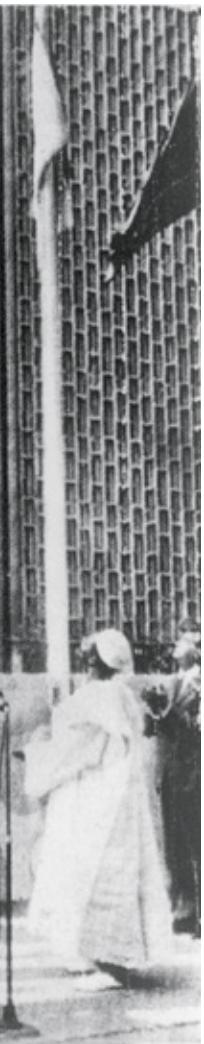
I wish the UN a happy 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and many more successful years.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, speaking via video message at a commemoration ceremony of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations on 21 September 2020.

with the emergence of challenges such as extremism, terrorism and the unsustainable pace of development, have caused fissures in globalisation. At the same time, they have highlighted the importance of international cooperation in overcoming such global challenges. "The COVID-19 crisis ... has reminded us how interconnected and interdependent countries are, and why we all need to work together to defeat the gravest challenge of our time," said Mr Lee at the High-Level Meeting Commemorating UN75. "Member states expect a lot from the UN, and it is only right that we give the UN commensurate latitude, resources and mandate to fulfil its demanding mission."

## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

- **1965:** Singapore was admitted to the United Nations as its 117<sup>th</sup> member.
- **1982:** As the President of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, then-Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations Professor Tommy Koh oversaw the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Dubbed "A Constitution for the Oceans", it set a record for amassing the most number of signatories on its first day.
- **1992:** Singapore convened the FOSS to give small states a bigger voice.
- **2001:** Singapore served on the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member for a year.
- **2009:** The Global Governance Group, spearheaded by Singapore, was formed to promote greater dialogue and interaction between the Group of Twenty (G20) and the UN.
- **2018:** The UN adopted the Singapore Convention on Mediation, which fills a gap in the international dispute resolution enforcement framework (more on page 10).



# VIRTUALLY YOU

Leveraging technology to continue to facilitate mutual learning and sharing.

## Public Private Partnerships: Infrastructure Projects Development

3 – 6 AUGUST 2020

The first online SCP course discussed the role and challenges of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), as well as the main sectors where PPPs are common. Participants also learnt about the Singapore PPP framework through a study of the Singapore Sports Hub.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Singapore Sports Hub is one of the largest sports infrastructure projects in the world that was undertaken through PPP. It has the world's largest free-spanning retractable dome roof. It is also home to community facilities that are available 24/7, such as beach volleyball, courts for futsal, basketball and netball, as well as running and skate parks.



## Initiative for ASEAN Integration: Project Planning and Management at the Laos-Singapore Cooperation Centre

10 – 14 AUGUST 2020

Conducted under the auspices of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), this was the first virtual course at the Laos-Singapore Cooperation Centre. Participants learnt to initiate, plan, execute, manage and deliver projects in a structured and systematic manner.

## Technology and Courts of the Future

14 – 18 SEPTEMBER 2020

In this course conducted by the Singapore Judicial College, participants learnt about the experiences of the Singapore Judiciary in conceptualising and implementing technology to build a future-ready judicial system. Participants also had a chance to view how augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) could be used in courts of the future.

SCAN QR CODE TO  
CHECK OUT THE  
COURSE HIGHLIGHTS



# OURS

## DID YOU KNOW?

Former Chief Executive of IPOS, Mr Daren Tang, became the first Singaporean to helm a United Nations agency. He was appointed Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) on 8 May 2020.



## Singapore-United States Third Country Training Programme: Workshop on Adapting Intellectual Property to Promote Innovation and Creativity in New Technologies

17 SEPTEMBER 2020 – 21 JANUARY 2021

Curated for participants from ASEAN and Timor-Leste, this workshop showcases how cutting-edge technologies promote innovation and creativity. It also examines the impact of such technologies on existing intellectual property rights systems. Trainers from the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS) and the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) share their insights in this ongoing weekly course.



## Singapore-UNDRR Joint Training Programme: Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction

23 SEPTEMBER – 14 OCTOBER 2020

Conducted in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), trainers from the UNDRR Global Education and Training Institute and the Civil Service College Singapore spoke on key principles of Disaster Risk Reduction and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants also observed this year's International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction by watching the United Nations Secretary-General's video message on the importance of strengthening disaster risk governance.

## Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP)'s new online platform – START

SCP has launched the SCP Training Administration Reporting Tool (START), a one-stop online portal where you can access information and submit applications for upcoming SCP courses. Henceforth, applications for SCP courses will have to be submitted via START, which is available at <https://www.scp.gov.sg>.

Refer to the START user guides below for more information:

- Applicants and Applicants' Supervisors:  
<https://go.gov.sg/start-guide>
- National Focal Points for Technical Assistance (NFPs):  
<https://go.gov.sg/start-nfp>

in singapore

# A SHARED LOVE

Singaporeans from all walks of life come together to celebrate an intangible aspect of everyday life: hawker culture.

**Despite its small landmass**, Singapore is chockfull of instantly-recognisable icons, including the modern Supertrees at Gardens by the Bay and the rich architecture of its Civic District. But in recent months, another aspect of local culture has been causing quite a stir: that of its local food, hawker centres and tradition of communal dining. Put together, they form one of modern Singapore's most endearing and enduring traditions: its hawker culture.

## HAWKER HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Hawkers have been feeding Singaporeans for centuries — the peddling of food by streetside vendors was already a common sight in the country in the 1800s. Even then, cuisines were an avenue for the island's multiracial character to be on full display. Older Singaporeans have fond memories of street hawkers who sold everything from *rojak* (a salad of mixed vegetables and fruits, drizzled with a sweet and sour sauce) to *Hokkien mee* (fried prawn noodles). Over the years, these hawkers have taken inspiration from their multicultural surroundings, creating fusion dishes with bold, new tastes and flavours.



A FATHER ENJOYING CENDOL, A LOCAL DESSERT, WITH HIS CHILDREN AT A HAWKER CENTRE.

RIGHT: PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE AGE GROUPS, GENDERS, ETHNICITIES AND RELIGIONS DINE IN AND SOCIALISE AT A HAWKER CENTRE.



Following Singapore's independence in 1965, hawkers began to shift away from peddling food on the streets. They moved towards operating out of Singapore's 100 or so hawker centres, which are affectionately known to some as "community dining rooms". These large open-air complexes house many stalls, each selling different dishes from the diverse cultures that call Singapore home. The hallmarks of these hawker centres are their affordability and informality, making them accessible to the entire population. In an interview with *The Straits Times*, sociologist Mr Terence Chong noted, "(Hawker centres are) places in Singapore where people from all walks of life can gather without any inhibition."

Given the importance of hawker culture to the Singapore story, in 2018, the Republic embarked on a quest to nominate it for inclusion into the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Announcing the bid, Prime



## DID YOU KNOW?

Some **6,000** hawkers whip up close to **200** affordable meals each daily. These meals are consumed by more than four in five Singaporeans at least once a week.

Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted that hawker food remains the biggest draw for Singaporeans overseas and is the "best cure for homesickness". He added, "The UNESCO inscription will help to safeguard and promote this unique culture for future generations. It will also let the rest of the world know about our local food and multicultural heritage."

“

When we eat at a hawker centre, we don't just get to choose food from one ethnic group. You can get food from all the different races. This is an example for our future generations: we show unity not only in our actions and thoughts, but through our food as well.

**Mr B Vijaya Ragavan**, a third-generation hawker at Zam Zam Muslim Food, who shared his support for the bid. Watch hawkers like him share their views on the effort in this video:



ABOVE: A HAWKER DEMONSTRATES TECHNIQUES FOR MAKING CHICKEN RICE. THIS IS PART OF THE "HAWKER FAIR SERIES".

exhibition that visited 14 locations across Singapore over three months. Aptly titled “Our SG Hawker Culture”, the travelling showcase was a multi-agency effort by the National Heritage Board (NHB), the National Environment Agency and the Federation of Merchants’ Associations, Singapore. Messages of support were penned by everybody. Then-Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Ms Grace Fu wrote that she supports the nomination because hawker culture “is an important part of our lives”. Since its launch, the exhibition has garnered more than 220,000 pledges online and at various venues around the island.

The local creative community — comprising writers, illustrators, photographers and designers — has also been invited to celebrate Singapore’s hawker culture online. For example, the culinary history of *kueh tutu* — a snowy-white, pillow-like rice flour cake served steaming hot on a blade of pandan leaf — is celebrated through the eyes of celebrity chef Willin Low, who savoured the snack regularly as a child. In a video series on Instagram (@willcookwilleat), Chef Low explains how *kueh tutu* was popularised by hawkers like Ms Tan Bee Hua — the current owner of the popular Tan’s Tutu Coconut Cake. The series is part of NHB’s

**DigiMuse Presents: Hawker Culture Edition** (<https://go.gov.sg/digimuse>).



THE DIGIMUSE PRESENTS: HAWKER CULTURE EDITION SUPPORTS INITIATIVES BY LOCAL CREATIVES THAT CELEBRATE HAWKER CULTURE.

## A NATIONAL EFFORT

As *Experience Singapore* discovered, getting hawker culture inscribed on UNESCO’s list required the experiences, efforts and support of the public. Singapore’s nominating documents to UNESCO were bolstered by over 200 letters of support from hawkers’ associations, schools, community groups, non-governmental organisations and private organisations across various sectors, from food and hospitality to education.

Diners also showed their support for the nomination bid through a roving

## A THUMBS-UP

Singapore’s bid for hawker culture to be inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity has been widely welcomed.



More than  
**1.9 million**  
pledges of support  
from the public



Over  
**36,000**  
well-wishes  
from people of  
all walks of life



**Over 200**  
letters of support  
from schools, hawkers’  
association, non-government  
organisations, community  
groups and  
private organisations

The outcome of the bid will be announced in December 2020.



joining hands

# A LONG BUT MEANINGFUL JOURNEY

The first United Nations treaty to be named after Singapore, the Singapore Convention on Mediation came into force on 12 September this year. Ms Sharon Ong, the Ministry of Law's Director-General (International & Advisory), reflects on the journey.

"I was the head of the Singapore delegation involved in the negotiations of the draft text of the Singapore Convention on Mediation at the United Nations (UN). Our delegation was one of the key players at a working group of the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and we actively shaped the discussions on the Convention's form and text," she said.

To facilitate these discussions, the Singapore delegation got on phone calls with delegates across different time zones. While this meant that calls would sometimes stretch into the wee hours of the morning, Ms Ong shared that the regular and constructive dialogues and interactions were important for resolving

differences of opinion inter-sessionally, and to keep up warm ties. Over time, the Singapore delegation won the support and trust of other delegations. This helped Singapore earn a solid reputation for being an honest broker and contributor to the development of the text.

The Singapore delegation also forged strong ties with delegates from all around the world, including those from the United States, China, India, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Israel, and fellow ASEAN Member States. "It took three years of negotiations, but we finally reached consensus on the text that eventually defined the UN treaty on mediation," said Ms Ong.



MS SHARON ONG AND MR GEORGE LIM SC, CHAIRMAN OF THE SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION CENTRE, WITH A DELEGATE FROM SPAIN.

## MOMENTS TO REMEMBER

Much happened over the three years, but three moments stood out for Ms Ong. The first took place on 9 February 2017, when a snowstorm that struck New York forced an emergency closure of the UN headquarters. "We were determined not to lose momentum, and managed to find a law firm's office to hole up at to continue our deliberations. The delegates were committed to staying on, and tried hard to reach a breakthrough in the discussions, which we eventually did. There was a great sense of achievement in the air after," said Ms Ong. Another memorable moment came a year later when Ms Ong formally conveyed the Singapore Government's offer to host



WITH THE SINGAPORE FLAG, TAKEN DURING THE TRIP TO DEPOSIT SINGAPORE'S INSTRUMENT OF RATIFICATION AT THE UN HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK.

## To date, there are **53 signatories**

to the Singapore Convention on Mediation, and **6** countries have ratified the Convention.

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS



PART OF THE WORKING GROUP THAT WOULD DEFINE THE TEXT OF THE SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION.

the signing ceremony of the Convention. "I was grateful and humbled that the announcement was met with overwhelming support from all the delegations," she said. The third treasured memory was reuniting with some of the delegates in Singapore at the signing ceremony, where Ms Ong headed the VIP Engagement team. Ms Ong recalled, "It was an amazing experience to welcome delegates from all around the world to Singapore and show them where Home is. We have, over our shared three-year journey, bonded and become friends."



SHARING ABOUT SINGAPORE'S EXPERIENCES ON MEDIATION, INCLUDING THE SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION, AT THE TASHKENT LAW SPRING INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FORUM IN UZBEKISTAN IN APRIL 2019.

On 20 December 2018, the UN General Assembly:

- Adopted the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation;
- Authorised a ceremony for the opening for signature of the Convention to be held in Singapore;
- Recommended that the Convention be known as the "Singapore Convention on Mediation".

That day was a recognition of Singapore's efforts and commitment to international commercial mediation, and a testament to the contributions of the Singapore team from across various agencies that had made it possible.

Singapore subsequently hosted the signing ceremony, with ministers and senior officials from 70 countries in attendance. On 7 August 2019, history was made when 46 countries signed the Singapore Convention on Mediation — one of the highest number of first-day signatories for any UN trade convention, and a "powerful statement in support of multilateralism".<sup>1</sup>



### ORCHID TALES

The "Aranda Singapore Convention on Mediation" hybrid orchid was the brainchild of Ms Ong. Referring to the special bloom that was created to commemorate the historic signing of the Convention in Singapore, she said, "I see myself as the mother of this very special and beautiful orchid, which has great personal significance to me!"



MS ONG AT A TRAINING WORKSHOP IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, EXPLAINING THE SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION.

## ABOUT THE SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION



The Singapore Convention on Mediation is a game-changer for the use of cross-border mediation to resolve commercial disputes and is also a milestone development in facilitating international trade and commerce.

It removes one of the most cited barriers to mediation — the lack of an efficient and harmonised framework for cross-border enforcement of settlement agreements. With the Convention, businesses will now have greater certainty that their cross-border

disputes which were settled through mediation can be effectively enforced.

Mediation also has the following benefits:

- It is cost-effective, flexible, efficient and confidential.
- Allows parties to retain control over the outcome of their disputes.
- Allows parties to preserve their business relationships as it provides an amicable way of resolving disputes.

<sup>1</sup> Speech by PM Lee Hsien Loong at the Singapore Convention Signing Ceremony and Conference, 7 August 2019 at <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lee-Hsien-Loong-at-Singapore-Convention-Signing-Ceremony-and-Conference>

A NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SINGAPORE COOPERATION PROGRAMME

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Singapore's hawker heritage is a 'cultural ecosystem' in itself. It encompasses the colourful origins of hawker dishes, physical landmarks and even its own parlance, used when ordering certain food.



in singapore

Moulds used to make *kueh tutu*, a traditional steamed rice flour snack that typically features a coconut or peanut filling, commonly found in Singapore and the region.