

## SINGAPORE

### CRC CRC/C/133 (2003)

384. The Committee considered the initial report of Singapore (CRC/C/51/Add.8) at its 908th and 909th meetings (see CRC/C/SR.908 and 909), held on 26 September 2003, and adopted, at the 918th meeting, held on 3 October 2003, the following concluding observations.

#### A. Introduction

385. The Committee welcomes the submission of the State party's comprehensive and well-written initial report, as well as the detailed written replies to its list of issues (CRC/C/Q/SIN/1), which gave a clearer understanding of the situation of children in the State party. It further notes with appreciation the high-level delegation sent by the State party and welcomes the frank dialogue and the positive reactions to the suggestions and recommendations made during the discussion.

#### B. Positive aspects

386. The Committee notes with appreciation the high standard of living of children in the State party, and considerable efforts to implement the economic, social and cultural rights of children, in particular through the wide availability of high-quality health and education services and housing.

387. The Committee welcomes the adoption in 2003 of the Compulsory Education Act.

388. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's development and dissemination of awareness-raising materials, including child-friendly pamphlets and brochures, on the rights of children for both parents and children.

#### C. Principal subjects of concern and recommendations

##### 1. General measures of implementation

##### Declarations and reservations

389. The Committee is concerned about the declarations on articles 12-17, 19 and 39 and reservations to articles 7, 9, 10, 22, 28 and 32 entered by the State party on its accession to the Convention.

390. In light of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the Committee recommends that the State party withdraw its declarations on and reservations to the Convention.

##### Legislation

391. While recognizing that most of the principles and provisions of the Convention are in fact implemented in practice, the Committee remains concerned that domestic legislation does not fully reflect all the principles and provisions of the Convention.

392. The Committee recommends that the State party undertake a comprehensive review of its legislation and take all necessary measures to ensure its conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention.

### Coordination

393. The Committee notes with appreciation the establishment of an Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Convention. However, it is concerned that the Inter-Ministry Committee's mandate does not include coordination of all policies and programmes for children and that no such permanent coordination mechanism exists. The Committee also regrets that the State party has not developed a national plan of action for children.

394. The Committee recommends that the State party expand the mandate and function of the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention to include coordination of all programmes and policies for children, and that it spearhead the development of a national plan of action for children for the full implementation of the Convention and which takes into consideration the outcome document, "A World Fit for Children", of the General Assembly 2002 special session on children.

### Independent monitoring

395. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the Government and individual ministries to effectively address complaints, including those from children. However, it is concerned at the absence of an independent mechanism with a mandate regularly to monitor and evaluate progress in the implementation of the Convention and which is empowered to receive and address individual complaints, including from children, regarding all areas covered by the Convention.

396. The Committee encourages the State party to establish an independent and effective mechanism, in accordance with the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles, General Assembly resolution 48/134, annex) and the Committee's general comment No. 2 on national human rights institutions, which is provided with adequate human and financial resources and easily accessible to children and which monitors the implementation of the Convention, deals with complaints from children in a child-sensitive and expeditious manner, and provides remedies for violations of their rights under the Convention.

### Resources for children

397. The Committee notes with appreciation the considerable proportion of the national budget

devoted to health and education. Yet, it is concerned that resources allocated for social services for children are insufficient to respond to national and local priorities for the protection and promotion of children's rights and are not commensurate with budgetary allocations of other States at a similar level of economic development.

398. The Committee recommends the State party pay particular attention to the full implementation of article 4 of the Convention by:

(a) Prioritizing budgetary allocations to ensure implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of children, in particular those belonging to economically disadvantaged groups, "to the maximum extent of ... available resources";

(b) Identifying the amount and proportion of the State budget spent on children in the public, private and NGO sectors in order to evaluate the impact of the expenditure and also, in view of the costs, the accessibility, quality and effectiveness of the services provided for children in the various sectors.

#### Data collection

399. The Committee welcomes the considerable statistical data provided by the State party in its report, as well as the written replies to the list of issues. At the same time, the Committee shares the State party's concern at the lack of global outcome indicators and qualitative data on the implementation of the Convention.

400. The Committee recommends that the State party establish a centralized mechanism for the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on children, and strengthen its efforts to develop global outcome indicators for children.

#### Dissemination and training

401. The Committee is concerned that children and the public at large, as well as all groups of professionals working with and for children, are not sufficiently aware of the Convention and the rights-based approach enshrined therein.

402. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Undertake public awareness campaigns on children's rights aimed at the general public and specifically at children;

(b) Carry out systematic education and training on the principles and provisions of the Convention for all professionals working with and for children, in particular teachers, judges, parliamentarians, law enforcement officials, civil servants, municipal workers, personnel working in institutions and places of detention for children, health personnel, including psychologists, and social workers.

#### International cooperation

403. While noting the international cooperation undertaken by the State party within the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Committee encourages the State party to implement the United Nations target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to overseas development assistance.

## 2. Definition of the child

404. The Committee is concerned that the Children and Young Persons Act is only applicable to persons under the age of 16 and that the minimum age of criminal responsibility (7 years) and the minimum age of employment (12 years) are too low.

405. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Extend the Children and Young Persons Act to cover all persons under the age of 18;
- (b) Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to an internationally acceptable level;
- (c) Raise the minimum age of employment to 15 years, the age for the end of compulsory schooling.

## 3. General principles

### Non-discrimination

406. The Committee is concerned that the principle of non-discrimination is restricted to citizens, that the Constitution does not expressly prohibit discrimination against women or persons with disabilities, and that societal discrimination against girls, children with disabilities and non-residents persists.

407. The Committee recommends that the State party amend its legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender or disability and ensure that it is applicable to all persons in the State party. The Committee further recommends that the State party undertake all necessary proactive measures to combat societal discrimination, in particular against girls, children with disabilities and non-residents, through, inter alia, public education and awareness campaigns.

408. The Committee requests that specific information be included in the next periodic report on the measures and programmes relevant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child undertaken by the State party to follow up on the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and taking account of general comment No. 1 on article 29 (1) of the Convention (aims of education).

### Best interests of the child

409. The Committee is concerned that the principle that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (art. 3) is not fully reflected in the State party's legislation, policies and programmes at the national and local levels.

410. The Committee recommends that the State party review its legislation and administrative measures to ensure that article 3 of the Convention is duly reflected therein and that this principle is taken into account when administrative, policy, judicial or other decisions are made.

#### Respect for the views of the child

411. The Committee is concerned that traditional attitudes towards children in society limit respect for their views within the family, schools, other institutions and society at large.

412. The Committee recommends that the State party, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention:

(a) Ensure that the Children and Young Persons Act be revised to include the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to take effective measures, including legislation, to promote and facilitate respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them, by courts, administrative bodies and schools;

(b) Provide educational information to, inter alia, parents, educators, government administrative officials, the judiciary and society at large on children's right to have their views taken into account and to participate in matters affecting them;

(c) Undertake a regular review of the extent to which children's views are taken into consideration and of the impact this has on policies and programmes, as well as on children themselves.

#### 4. Civil rights and freedoms

413. The Committee is concerned that elements of the State party's immigration and citizenship laws do not fully conform to articles 2 and 7 of the Convention. In particular, the Committee is concerned that Singaporean citizenship is not acquired automatically by children of a Singaporean mother and a foreign father born overseas, and that in such cases the mother is obliged to apply for "citizenship by registration".

414. The Committee recommends that the State party review its citizenship and immigration laws and undertake the necessary reforms to ensure that they respect, as far as possible, the right of the child to nationality and identity, without discrimination.

#### Corporal punishment

415. The Committee notes with concern that corporal punishment is permitted by law in the home, schools and institutions and as a form of punishment for male juvenile offenders.

416. The Committee recommends that the State party amend its legislation to prohibit corporal punishment in the home, schools, institutions and the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party conduct well-targeted public awareness campaigns on the negative impact corporal punishment has on children, and provide training for teachers and

personnel working in institutions and youth detention centres on non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment.

## 5. Family environment and alternative care

### Parental responsibilities

417. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to provide counselling and assistance to families and children and to resolve difficulties between parents and children without resorting to the courts and in a manner consistent with the best interests of the child. Nevertheless, it is concerned that children in such circumstances are not afforded the full protection of the law because parents are able to file complaints that their children are "beyond parental control", which, according to the law, can lead to the placement of these children in institutions for juvenile delinquents. The Committee also shares the State party's concern that children are left at home alone.

418. The Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to provide support and counselling for families at risk, and amend its legislation to ensure the full protection of children in difficult circumstances while eliminating the possibility for parents to initiate court proceedings against their children because they are "beyond parental control". The Committee further recommends that the State party expand measures to support working parents and to prevent children from being left alone at home.

### Abuse and neglect

419. The Committee welcomes the creation of mechanisms such as the Child Abuse Protection Team and the Family Protection Unit to deal with complaints of abuse and provide assistance to victims and their families. However, the Committee is concerned that underreporting remains a problem and that social workers, teachers and medical personnel are not required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse.

420. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen measures to encourage reporting of instances of child maltreatment and abuse, through, inter alia, legislative measures requiring social workers, teachers and medical personnel to report suspected cases of child abuse to the appropriate authorities.

## 6. Basic health and welfare

421. The Committee notes with appreciation the excellent level of health indicators for children and the wide availability of high-quality health-care services, as noted in paragraph 3 above. However, it remains concerned that the incidence of exclusive breastfeeding is relatively low and that youth suicide rates are on the rise.

422. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen its efforts to promote exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of an infant's

life through, inter alia, the adoption and implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, obtaining certification for hospitals as baby-friendly hospitals and extending maternity leave;

(b) Strengthen adolescent health services, in particular counselling services and suicide prevention programmes.

#### Children with disabilities

423. While noting that special education services are widely available in the State party, the Committee is concerned that children with disabilities are not fully integrated into the education system and that there is a lack of quantitative and qualitative data on children with disabilities and their needs.

424. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Extend the Compulsory Education Act (2003) to include special schools and all children with disabilities;

(b) Facilitate greater integration and participation of children with disabilities into mainstream education and society at large, inter alia through an improvement in curricula and pedagogical services;

(c) Gather qualitative and quantitative data on children with disabilities and their specific needs and use these data to develop appropriate programmes and policies for them.

#### 7. Education, leisure and cultural activities

425. As noted in paragraph 4 above, the Committee welcomes the adoption of the Compulsory Education Act in 2003 and the wide availability of high-quality education services in the State party. However, the Committee is concerned that not all children within the State party's jurisdiction are covered by the Compulsory Education Act or have access to free primary school. The Committee is also concerned that the highly competitive nature of the education system risks hampering the development of the child to his or her fullest potential. Finally, the Committee is concerned about the monitoring of the quality of services provided by student care centres.

426. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Extend the Compulsory Education Act to include all children within the State party, including non-citizens, and monitor the implementation of the Act to ensure that all children attend school;

(b) Ensure that all children in the State party have access to free primary education, and ensure that low-income families have access to pre-primary education;

(c) Undertake effective measures to reduce school-related stress and the competitiveness of the

school system and strengthen efforts to promote the development of children's personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential, including through the promotion of cultural life and the arts and play and recreational activities in schools;

(d) Undertake measures to ensure comprehensive monitoring of the quality of student care centres and any other organizations providing care before and after school;

(e) Include human rights education as part of the curriculum.

## 8. Special protection measures

### Juvenile justice

427. The Committee is concerned that the minimum age of criminal responsibility is too low, that all persons in conflict with the law under 18 are not afforded special protection, and that corporal punishment and solitary confinement are used to discipline juvenile offenders.

428. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure the full implementation of juvenile justice standards, in particular articles 37, 39 and 40 of the Convention, as well the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) and the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines), and in the light of the Committee's day of general discussion on the administration of juvenile justice, held in 1995;

(b) Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to an internationally acceptable level;

(c) Amend the Children and Young Persons Act to ensure special protection for all offenders up to the age of 18;

(d) Prohibit the use of corporal punishment, including whipping and caning, and solitary confinement in all detention institutions for juvenile offenders, including police stations;

(e) Seek technical assistance from, among others, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in reforming the juvenile justice system, in particular with regard to juvenile detention and rehabilitation services.

## 9. Optional Protocols

429. The Committee notes that the State party has not ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

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the involvement of children in armed conflict.

10. Dissemination of documents

431. Finally, in light of article 44, paragraph 6, of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the initial report and written replies submitted by the State party be made widely available to the public at large and that the publication of the report be considered, along with the relevant summary records and concluding observations adopted by the Committee. Such a document should be widely distributed in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention and its implementation and monitoring within the Government, the Parliament and the general public, including concerned non-governmental organizations.

11. Next report

432. In light of the recommendation on reporting periodicity adopted by the Committee and described in the report on its twenty-ninth session (CRC/C/114), the Committee underlines the importance of a reporting practice that is in full compliance with the provisions of article 44 of the Convention. An important aspect of States parties' responsibilities to children under the Convention is ensuring that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has regular opportunities to examine the progress made in the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, regular and timely reporting by States parties is crucial. As an exceptional measure, in order to help the State party catch up with its reporting obligations so as to be in full compliance with the Convention, the Committee invites the State party to submit its second and third periodic reports in one consolidated report by 3 November 2007, the date on which the third report is due. This consolidated report should not exceed 120 pages (see CRC/C/118). The Committee expects the State party to report thereafter every five years, as foreseen by the Convention.