**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SINGAPORE TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AT GENEVA AMBASSADOR UMEJ BHATIA AT SINGAPORE’S REVIEW AT THE 38TH SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP MEETING, 12 MAY 2021**

Madam President,

Members of the Troika,

Distinguished representatives from fellow UN Member States,

Members of civil society, including my fellow citizens from Singapore,

I am honored to address you at the start of Singapore’s 3rd Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Allow me first to commend the UPR Secretariat for all their support in arrangements for today’s review. The special virtual modalities allow the UPR to continue uninterrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is vital. The UPR mechanism is the signature process of the Human Rights Council. It has helped to promote the protection of human rights globally. The high level of engagement during these virtual sessions is testament to the value placed on the UPR mechanism by all UN Member States.

Madam President,

Singapore engages in each cycle of the UPR with sincerity and seriousness. Like previous cycles, today’s review is an opportunity to reflect constructively with our peers on our human rights journey to date. We look forward to the exchange with our fellow states and receiving their recommendations. The importance we place on this process is reflected not only in the size, but also the strength and diversity of our delegation participating virtually from Singapore today. Like a few of you here today, some of our colleagues in our multi-racial, multi-religious delegation are preparing to celebrate the end of their Holy Month after a month of fasting.

Led by our head of delegation, Ambassador at Large, Professor Chan Heng Chee, the 15 government agencies that comprise Singapore’s Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights have worked as one over the past two years towards this review. They have carefully reviewed progress made in implementing the numerous accepted recommendations from our last review in 2016. But they have not done this alone. Various Singaporean civil society groups have been consulted throughout this process. Due to pandemic-related constraints, we carried out some of our public consultations virtually while striving to maintain a high quality of engagement and discussion. We appreciate the frank feedback received from civil society and value their engagement.

Moving forward, we will strive to sustain this valuable dialogue with all our stakeholders. Singapore remains committed to the regular review of our policies and approaches to ensure that they continue to benefit all our people and that no one is left behind. In our densely populated and diverse island city-state, Singapore has focused on achieving tangible outcomes for our people, while respecting our human rights obligations. Policymaking does not, however, exist in a vacuum and is informed by evolving societal perspectives and circumstances. It requires maintaining a dynamic and delicate balance between different segments of our society, while managing demands to privilege one group over others. As we forge consensus, we have also had to adapt policies across the board over the last year to tackle COVID-19 in a manner that guarantees the continued well-being of our people. This includes our foreign and migrant workers who have played an important part in Singapore’s overall development journey.

Madam President,

Before I cede the floor, allow me to introduce our head of delegation, Ambassador at Large, Professor Chan Heng Chee, who will participate virtually from Singapore. Ambassador Chan is no stranger to this key forum, having also led our delegation in 2016. She is a humanitarian, a thinker, and a diplomat with an illustrious career who blazed the way for Singaporean women in academia, diplomacy and other areas. She served as Singapore’s first female Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and as our first female Ambassador to the United States. She is a member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights and was also Singapore’s representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights from 2013 to 2015. Ambassador Chan, it is my privilege to give you the floor.

(629 words, approx. 5 minutes)