**CLOSING REMARKS BY**

**AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE**

**PROFESSOR CHAN HENG CHEE**

**AT THE REVIEW OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

**AT THE 38TH SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP MEETING,**

**12 MAY 2021**

Madam President, Distinguished Delegates,

I thank all delegations that have participated actively in Singapore’s third UPR today.

We are humbled by your positive words and acknowledgement of Singapore’s efforts to build a more inclusive, cohesive and resilient society.

We also appreciate the frank feedback on areas that Singapore has further room to improve upon. While most issues raised have already been covered by my delegation, I would like to address three additional issues.

Death Penalty

Let me deal with the issue of the death penalty which was brought up by several European delegations.

As my colleague mentioned earlier, we impose the death penalty only for the most serious crimes. We fully recognise that capital punishment is serious and irreversible. That is why we have rigorous judicial processes and legal standards to protect the rights of the accused. This includes providing free legal counsel at trial and on appeal to ensure that all persons accused of capital offences have adequate legal representation.

Capital punishment is imposed only after due process and in strict adherence with the law by an independent and impartial judiciary. The Prosecution bears the burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt. Every capital case is tried in the High Court, and can be appealed to the Court of Appeal. Even where there is no appeal, the Court of Appeal must review the conviction for which capital punishment has been imposed, and be satisfied as to the correctness, legality and propriety of the conviction and sentence, before capital punishment can be meted out.

Capital punishment is an issue on which countries continue to have differing views. It reflects the current state of international law, which continues to lack consensus on the matter.

Ultimately, the decision on whether to have the death penalty is a sovereign one. In Singapore, our view is that the Government has a responsibility to protect the fundamental right of our citizens to live in safety and security. Just as Singapore respects the decisions of States who have abolished the death penalty, we hope for similar respect for our decision to retain it.

Freedom of Expression

Now let me deal with the Freedom of Expression which was raised by many delegations in Europe, Latin America and Asia.

Freedom of expression must come with responsibility. This is particularly important in a compact, multi-racial and multi-religious city-state like Singapore. Our laws governing the freedom of expression, including the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, or POFMA, have been written with this in mind.

Let me underscore that POFMA only tackles falsehoods, and it does so in a calibrated way, primarily through the tagging of corrections, and is subject to judicial oversight. It does not cover criticism, opinions, satire or parody. Falsehoods, left unchecked, can undermine the marketplace of ideas, and free speech itself. They can seriously damage society, by pushing people to the extremes, and poisoning trust in institutions. The pandemic has highlighted how important trust is as a social asset. In times of crisis, governments which enjoy trust can secure the cooperation of their populations more swiftly, and react more effectively.

On defamation, our approach is simple, and not unique to Singapore. We believe not only in fair comment, but also that every individual has the right to protect his or her reputation against unfounded or scurrilous allegations. Our defamation law protects that right, by allowing defamatory allegations to be challenged in Court before an independent judiciary.

LGBT Issues

Thirdly, several delegations from Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa highlighted LGBT issues.

The LGBT community are valuable members of our society. The Government does not tolerate violence, abuse, discrimination, and harassment against the community. An annual Pink Dot event in Singapore has also been organised by the LGBT community for the past 12 years.

While Section 377A of the Penal Code remains on the books, the Government has stated clearly that it is not enforced. In the context of Singapore, where attitudes towards homosexuality are still evolving and various communities hold different ideas, any move by the Government must take into consideration the sentiments of all communities. We believe it is better to let the situation evolve gradually.

Now let me assure you that we will thoroughly examine the recommendations received today, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and consider how they can be implemented and best contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights in Singapore.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, the realisation of human rights is a continuous journey, and no one can claim to be perfect. This is the premise of the UPR. Singapore recognises that our efforts to promote and protect human rights are a work in progress, but we are committed to achieving better outcomes for our people. We will continue to implement measures to reach this objective, bearing in mind our national context and the need to preserve the hard-earned political trust of our people in Singapore’s democracy and institutions.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the troika, the Secretariat and the interpreters for their efforts to support this session, particularly given that it has been conducted in a hybrid format.

Thank you, Madam President.

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