



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
28 June 2019

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore*

I. Introduction

1. The Committee considered the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore (CRC/C/SGP/4-5) at its 2378th and 2379th meetings (see CRC/C/SR.2378 and 2379), held on 16 and 17 May 2019, and adopted the present concluding observations at its 2400th meeting, held on 31 May 2019.

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Singapore and the written replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/SGP/Q/4-5/Add.1), which allowed for a better understanding of the situation of children's rights in the State party. The Committee expresses appreciation for the constructive dialogue held with the multisectoral delegation of the State party.

II. Follow-up measures taken and progress achieved by the State party

3. The Committee welcomes the accession of the State party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 2017 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013.

4. The Committee notes with appreciation the legislative, institutional and policy measures adopted to implement the Convention, in particular the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act 2014, the Protection from Harassment Act and the third Enabling Masterplan (2017–2021). Furthermore, it welcomes enhanced leave schemes for parents, the Baby Bonus Scheme, the establishment of the family justice courts and the extension of compulsory education to children with special educational needs.

III. Main areas of concern and recommendations

5. The Committee reminds the State party of the indivisibility and interdependence of all the rights enshrined in the Convention and emphasizes the importance of all the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations. The Committee would like to draw the State party's attention to the recommendations concerning the following areas, in respect of which urgent measures must be taken: definition of the child (para. 18), non-discrimination (para. 20), corporal punishment (para. 27), children deprived of a family

* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-first session (13–31 May 2019).



environment (para. 32), education, including vocational training and guidance (para. 39) and administration of juvenile justice (para. 46).

6. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the realization of children's rights in accordance with the Convention, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also urges the State party to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concern children.**

A. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44 (6))

Reservations

7. **In the light of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the Committee regrets the State party's position not to withdraw any of its declarations to articles 12 to 17, 19 and 37 and reservations to articles 7, 9, 10, 22, 28 and 32 of the Convention. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 7) and urges the State party to reconsider its position.**

Legislation

8. **The Committee welcomes the information that the State party is continuously working to strengthen its legislation to enhance children's rights and particularly welcomes the increased protection for children proposed during the ongoing review of the Children and Young Persons Act. The Committee is deeply concerned, however, that a planned amendment of the Penal Code, as explained in the information provided by the State party after the dialogue, does not include section 376A (4), which stipulates that a minor under 16 years of age can consent to sexual activity with his or her spouse. The section implies that a minor under 16 years of age can get married. The proposed regulation, and any other regulation providing for marriage of children under 18 years of age, should urgently be brought into line with the provisions of the Convention.**

Comprehensive policy and strategy

9. **While the Committee takes note of the information that agencies implementing national policies relating to children are accountable to meet measurable and time-bound targets, it is concerned that the State party has still not adopted a comprehensive policy on children that encompasses all areas covered by the Convention. The Committee recommends that the State party adopt such a unified policy, and develop a strategy based on the policy, with elements for its application, supported by sufficient human, technical and financial resources.**

Coordination

10. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Strengthen the role of the Inter-Ministry Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as the principal institutional coordinating mechanism at the interministerial level, and provide it with a clear mandate and sufficient authority to coordinate all activities related to the implementation of the Convention at the cross-sectoral, national and local levels;**

(b) **Ensure that the Inter-Ministry Committee is provided with the necessary human, technical and financial resources for it to operate effectively;**

(c) Encourage the Inter-Ministry Committee to systematically scrutinize the adoption and implementation of policies and recommendations in relation to legislation relevant to children.

Allocation of resources

11. Recalling its general comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a budgeting process that includes a child rights perspective and specifies clear allocations to children in the relevant sectors and agencies, including specific indicators and a tracking system;

(b) Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the adequacy, efficacy and equitability of the distribution of resources allocated to the implementation of the Convention;

(c) Define budgetary lines for children that include all children, with special attention to those in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations who may require affirmative social measures, and make sure that those budgetary lines are protected even in situations of economic crisis, natural disasters or other emergencies.

Data collection

12. While welcoming the data collected and provided by the State party on several areas of the Convention, including through the National Youth Survey, and taking note of the State party's position that its current data collection is a sufficient basis for analysis and planning, the Committee, in the light of its general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention, recalls its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 17) and recommends that the State party:

(a) Develop a standardized information system in order to facilitate analysis and cross-referencing of data, in particular with regard to cases involving child abuse, neglect, exploitation and sexual exploitation and children with disabilities;

(b) Take into account the conceptual and methodological framework set out in the guidance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) entitled *Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation* when defining, collecting and disseminating statistical information.

Independent monitoring

13. While the Committee takes note of the information that there are several independent monitoring mechanisms in the State party, such as the review board for children and young persons placed in children and young persons' homes and the panel of advisers advising the Youth Court judge, it is concerned that they do not cover all areas of the Convention and that they do not provide a substitute for the functions of an independent national human rights institution. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Take immediate and concrete steps to establish an independent mechanism for monitoring human rights, including a specific mechanism for monitoring children's rights that is able to receive, investigate and address complaints by children in a child-sensitive manner;

(b) Guarantee the independence of such a monitoring mechanism, including with regard to its funding, mandate and immunities, so as to ensure full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles);

(c) Seek technical cooperation in establishing a monitoring mechanism from, among others, OHCHR, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme.

Dissemination, awareness-raising and training

14. While welcoming the integration of the subject “moral and ethical commitment to the rights of children” into the curriculum for student teachers, the Committee is concerned that the training does not include the fundamental principles of the Convention, in particular respect for the views of the child, and that the training is limited to teachers and student teachers. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to provide regular and systematic trainings on the principles and provisions of the Convention for all professionals working for and with children, such as judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, personnel working in institutions and places of detention for children, teachers, health personnel, including psychologists and social workers.

Cooperation with civil society

15. Recalling its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 22), the Committee recommends that the State party take concrete steps to systematically involve children’s organizations in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, plans and programmes related to children’s rights.

Children’s rights and the business sector

16. While taking note of the information that economic exploitation of children is low in the State party due to its strong legal safeguards, the Committee is concerned that the State party has not taken sufficient steps to provide a framework for national and international enterprises under its jurisdiction to report in all areas that may affect children’s rights. Recalling its general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights endorsed by the Human Rights Council in 2011, the Committee recommends that the State party establish and implement regulations to ensure that the business sector complies with international and national human rights, labour, environmental and other standards, particularly with regard to children’s rights. In particular, it recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a clear regulatory framework for companies operating in the State party to ensure that their activities do not negatively affect human rights or endanger environmental and other standards, especially those relating to children’s rights;

(b) Ensure effective implementation by companies, especially industrial companies, of international and national environment and health standards, effective monitoring of the implementation of those standards and the imposition of appropriate sanctions and provision of remedies when violations occur, and that appropriate international certification is sought;

(c) Require companies to undertake assessments, consultations and full public disclosure of the health-related environmental impacts of their business activities on children’s rights and their plans to address such impacts;

(d) Require companies to undertake due diligence in their operations and throughout the supply chain with regard to the harmful effects of environmental degradation on children’s rights.

B. Definition of the child (art. 1)

17. The Committee takes note of the information provided by the delegation that the proposed amendment to the Children and Young Persons Act, which includes protection for children between the ages of 16 and 18, will be presented to parliament by the end of 2019 or early in 2020. It welcomes the amendment to the Administration of Muslim Law Act, which raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years. It is, however, seriously concerned that subsection 96 (5) of that law still allows girls that have attained puberty to get married in exceptional cases.

18. **The Committee urges the State party to:**

(a) **Adopt, without further delay, the proposed amendment to the Children and Young Persons Act and set a specific timeline for its implementation;**

(b) **Remove all exceptions that allow for marriage under the age of 18 years, in particular subsection 96 (5) of the Administration of Muslim Law Act, and ensure compliance with such a prohibition;**

(c) **Conduct extensive public information campaigns to raise awareness of the elimination of any exceptions to the prohibition against the marriage of persons under 18.**

C. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

Non-discrimination

19. The Committee is concerned about the persisting discrimination, either in law or in practice or both, against, inter alia, children without Singaporean citizenship, girls, children with disabilities, children of ethnic minorities, children of unmarried couples and children of same-sex couples, as well as the lack of attention paid to discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.

20. **Taking note of target 10.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure compliance with article 2 of the Convention by incorporating the principle of non-discrimination into its domestic legislation and conduct an in-depth revision of its legislation in order to fully guarantee non-discrimination in law and in practice, including the right to inheritance of children of unmarried parents and of girls covered by the Administration of Muslim Law Act;**

(b) **Adopt a proactive and comprehensive strategy containing specific and well-targeted actions, including affirmative social actions, to eliminate discrimination against children in marginalized or vulnerable situations, including children without Singaporean citizenship, girls, children with disabilities, children of ethnic minorities, children of unmarried couples, children of same-sex couples and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children;**

(c) **Combat discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, including by decriminalizing consensual same-sex sexual acts, implementing awareness-raising and educational activities for children, families and the public and providing sensitivity training for the relevant professionals, including teachers, social workers, personnel of childcare institutions and law enforcement officers, so that children are encouraged to report cases of discrimination and violence and reported cases are promptly and appropriately addressed;**

(d) **Involve communities and the public at large by making systematic efforts, in collaboration with the mass media, social networks and community and religious leaders, to combat and change discriminatory attitudes towards and practices concerning children in general and children in disadvantaged and marginalized situations in particular;**

(e) **Include segments on non-discrimination and equality in the mandatory school curriculum for children of all ages, adapt teaching materials and regularly train teachers accordingly.**

Best interests of the child

21. The Committee welcomes the positive measures taken to integrate the principle of the best interests of the child, such as the child-sensitive approach to child abuse victims in police investigations and hearings in youth courts. Recalling its general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, the Committee recommends that the State party

strengthen its efforts to ensure that this right is appropriately integrated and consistently interpreted and applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings and decisions, including the ongoing review process of the Children and Young Persons Act, as well as in all policies, programmes and projects that are relevant to and have an impact on children. In that regard, the State party is encouraged to develop procedures and criteria to provide guidance to all relevant professionals for assessing and determining the best interests of the child in every area and for giving it due weight as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

Respect for the views of the child

22. The Committee welcomes the introduction of the appointment of child representatives in proceedings involving children, access for children to online consultation platforms, such as the Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry at Home (REACH) national consultation portal, and the establishment of forum and panel discussions that allow students to exchange ideas with political leaders and policymakers. Recalling its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 34) and its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen its efforts to ensure that children's views are heard and given due consideration in the family, at school, in the courts and in all relevant administrative and other processes concerning children;

(b) Adopt appropriate legislation, train parents and professionals working with and for children, and establish operational procedures or protocols for such professionals;

(c) Conduct programmes and awareness-raising activities to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children within the family, schools and the community, paying particular attention to children in vulnerable situations.

D. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8 and 13–17)

Name and nationality

23. Reiterating its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 36) and taking note of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Take immediate and concrete steps to ensure that all Singaporean mothers can transfer their citizenship to their children, including to children born before 2004;

(b) Consider amending article 122 of the Constitution to ensure that no child is, or becomes, stateless;

(c) Consider ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

24. Reiterating its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 38), the Committee echoes its earlier concern that the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are severely restricted in the State party and subject to undue limitations, with serious repercussions on the rights of children to freely express themselves, including on the Internet. The Committee urges the State party to review its laws and policies, in particular the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act and the Public Order Act, in order to ensure full respect for the rights and freedoms guaranteed to children under the Convention, and that any restrictions to those rights fully comply with international standards.

Right to privacy

25. The Committee recommends that the State party take legislative and policy measures to protect the right of the child to privacy, including by:

- (a) Amending the Personal Data Protection Act to include special provisions regarding children;
- (b) Reinforcing the Internet Code of Practice for local Internet access service providers with the aim to improve reporting for service providers regarding unsuitable content;
- (c) Strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring and prosecuting information and communications technology-related violations of children rights.

E. Violence against children (arts. 19, 24 (3), 28 (2), 34, 37 (a) and 39)**Corporal punishment**

26. The Committee is deeply concerned that, despite repeated recommendations of international human rights mechanisms, including the Committee's previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 40), as reconfirmed by the delegation during the dialogue, corporal punishment remains legal in all settings, except in early childhood development centres.

27. In the light of its general comments No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment and No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence and taking note of target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee urges the State party to:

- (a) Adopt, without further delay, legislation explicitly and unconditionally prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment of children in all settings, namely in the home, at school, in alternative care settings and in the administration of justice;
- (b) Collect, share and make publicly available data, disaggregated by the sex, age, disability and ethnic origin of the child, on all cases of corporal punishment and violence against children, including in educational institutions, alternative care institutions and in the home;
- (c) Further strengthen and expand programmes and policies aimed at combating violence against children, including evidence-based positive parenting programmes;
- (d) Conduct campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the harmful effects of corporal punishment, with a view to changing the general attitude towards the practice, and involve children, parents, teachers and other persons working with or for children so as to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline.

Abuse and neglect

28. The Committee welcomes the introduction of a national child protection training framework in 2015 for better detection of abuse and the need for intervention, supported in particular by the Sector-specific Screening Guide and the Child Abuse Reporting Guide. It recommends that the State party train all actors potentially involved in the detection of children suspected of having been subjected to sexual exploitation or abuse on applicable international child-rights norms and standards and on protection, reporting and referral procedures and a child-friendly and gender-sensitive approach to them. Furthermore, the Committee urges the State party to adopt a mandatory reporting protocol for child abuse and neglect.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

29. The Committee welcomes the legislative measures taken to strengthen the protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse through the adoption of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act 2014 and the amendments to the Penal Code in 2019, as well as the strengthened support for child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Recalling its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 65), the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Remove section 376A (4) from the Penal Code of 2019, which enables a man to have sexual relations with a spouse under 16 years of age with the spouse's consent;

(b) Conduct a national study on sexual exploitation and abuse of children to determine its root causes and assess its magnitude;

(c) Based on the findings of the above-mentioned study, design policies and programmes to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children;

(d) Expediently investigate, in a child-friendly manner through a specialized multidisciplinary team, cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of children, prosecute perpetrators and punish those convicted with appropriate sanctions.

F. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 9–11, 18 (1) and (2), 20, 21, 25 and 27 (4))

Family environment

30. The Committee welcomes the increase in preschool places, the introduction of a second mandatory week of paternity leave and measures taken to support low-income families and divorced parents. It remains concerned, however, that, despite enhanced subsidies for kindergarten and childcare services, mothers who do not meet the eligibility criteria, particularly mothers that do not work, might be denied access to childcare services. The Committee recalls its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 43) and recommends that the State party intensify its efforts to disseminate information about the availability of already existing childcare support services in the State party.

Children deprived of a family environment

31. While the Committee takes note of the information provided by the delegation regarding the current review of the Beyond Parental Control system, including the focus on a more family-oriented and child-centric approach, the Committee remains seriously concerned that the system in its current form may stigmatize children in need of support and that it may be perceived as punitive rather than supportive. It is also concerned that institutionalization is not used as a measure of last resort, that there is not sufficient provision for alternatives to institutionalization, such as temporary foster care, and that prolonged periods of institutionalization are harmful. The Committee is further concerned that children placed in institutions in accordance with the Beyond Parental Control system could sometimes come into contact with children in conflict with the law.

32. Drawing attention to the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (see General Assembly resolution 64/142, annex), and recalling its previous recommendations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 47), the Committee urges the State party to:

(a) Take advantage of the current review of the Beyond Parental Control system to transform it into a social support system, ensuring that children are placed in institutions only as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible period of time;

(b) Provide for alternative measures to institutionalization, such as temporary foster care and placement with extended family;

(c) Ensure periodic review of the placement of children in institutions and foster care and monitor the quality of care in such institutions and foster care, including by providing accessible channels for reporting, monitoring and remedying maltreatment of children;

(d) Ensure that children placed in institutions under the Beyond Parental Control system are kept separate from children in conflict with the law;

(e) Ensure that children placed in institutions or foster care are not stigmatized;

(f) Ensure that children placed in institutions have access to adequate support services.

Adoption

33. Taking note of the State party's efforts to strengthen safeguards for children in the adoption process, the Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 49) and recommends that the State party maintain a registry of all adopted children, establish a central authority to ensure protection of the rights of children involved in the adoption process and consider ratifying the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

Children whose parents have been sentenced to death

34. The Committee is seriously concerned at the situation of children whose parents have been sentenced to death and urges the State party to take the best interests of the child into consideration when issuing the death penalty. The Committee further recommends that the State party provide psychological and other support necessary to children whose parents have been sentenced to death.

G. Disability, basic health and welfare (arts. 6, 18 (3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (1)–(3) and 33)

Children with disabilities

35. While the Committee welcomes the inclusion of all children with moderate to severe special education needs in the Compulsory Education Act, it remains concerned at the insufficient quantitative and qualitative data on children with disabilities and their needs, that some children with disabilities are still not fully included in the education system, the persistence of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours against children with disabilities and that non-Singaporean children with disabilities enjoy less protection than their Singaporean peers. Recalling its general comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data on children with disabilities and their special needs and use them for the development of relevant policies and programmes;

(b) Strengthen the implementation of the policy of inclusive education in schools and increase the number of places in preschool for children with moderate to severe special educational needs, without discrimination of any kind;

(c) Increase the number of teachers and professionals trained on a human rights-based approach in integrated classes that provide individual support and due attention to children with learning difficulties;

(d) Strengthen awareness-raising campaigns targeting government officials, the public and families to combat stigma attached to and prejudice against children with disabilities and promote a positive image of children with disabilities.

Adolescent health

36. The Committee welcomes the information that sex education is compulsory in schools but is concerned that it emphasizes abstinence, contains limited information on contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted infections and lacks a gender perspective. Recalling its general comments No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention and No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence and taking note of target 5.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and ensure that the education is gender sensitive, does not discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and includes the use of contraception, including emergency contraception, and care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

Breastfeeding

37. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes;
- (b) Develop a national programme for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding through comprehensive campaigns;
- (c) Provide appropriate support to mothers through counselling structures in hospitals, clinics and the community;
- (d) Implement the baby-friendly hospital initiative throughout the country;
- (e) Consider ratifying the International Labour Organization Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

H. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28–31)

Education, including vocational training and guidance

38. While the Committee takes note of the State party's efforts to reduce performance-related stress and pressure on students, such as the amendments to the primary school leaving examination and its scoring system, the Committee is seriously concerned that the State party's education system continues to be highly competitive, generating high levels of stress and anxiety for children. The Committee is also concerned at the widespread enrolment of children in additional private tutoring taking place outside of school hours.

39. The Committee urges the State party to:

- (a) Evaluate its current system of education and related examinations, paying due regard to article 29 of the Convention and the Committee's general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education;
- (b) Increase its efforts to address the root causes of the widespread dependency on private tuition outside of school and the resulting inequality in access to higher education;
- (c) Ensure that children can realize their right to adequate leisure, cultural and recreational activities, in compliance with article 31 of the Convention.

Human rights education

40. The Committee recommends that the State party develop a national plan of action for human rights education, as recommended in the framework of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

I. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37 (b)–(d) and 38–40)

Migration

41. While taking note of the State party's arguments against amending its immigration laws, the Committee remains concerned that children whose parents' immigration, employment or housing status is uncertain face insecurity and may be at risk of separation or deportation. In line with its joint general comments No. 3 and No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 22 and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the human rights of children in the context of international migration and recalling its previous recommendation (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 45), the Committee urges the State party to reconsider its position and bring its legislation into line with article 9 of the Convention, ensuring that no child is separated from his or her parents.

Children belonging to minorities

42. In line with its general comment No. 11 (2009) on indigenous children and their rights under the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to provide equal opportunities for children of minority groups, in particular the Malay, and that it remove all policies that disadvantage or discriminate against minorities.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

43. While noting the increase in the minimum age for admission to employment from 12 to 13 years, the Committee is concerned that it is still below the compulsory school age. Taking note of target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party raise the minimum age for admission to employment to the compulsory school leaving age of 15 years old.

Sale, trafficking and abduction

44. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and the National Approach against Trafficking in Persons (2016–2026). Recalling its general comment No. 13 and taking note of target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Establish adequate and coordinated mechanisms to identify and protect child victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, including systematic and timely information-sharing among relevant officials, and strengthen the capacity of police officers, border guards and social workers to identify and protect child victims;
- (b) Ensure that all cases of sexual and labour exploitation, sale, abduction and trafficking are investigated and that the perpetrators are charged and punished;
- (c) Ensure the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources for the effective implementation of the laws relevant to the prevention of and protection from sale, trafficking and abduction.

Administration of juvenile justice

45. The Committee takes note of the proposed amendment to the Children and Young Persons Act to raise the upper age limit of a child or young person to 18 years. It also takes note that the State party has raised the age of criminal responsibility from 7 to 10 years of age through amendments to the Penal Code. The Committee is nonetheless seriously concerned that:

- (a) The current age of criminal responsibility, fixed at 10 years of age, remains low;

- (b) Children aged between 16 and 18 years are still treated as adults in the criminal justice system and may be sentenced to life imprisonment;
- (c) Corporal punishment is a lawful sentence for male children over the age of 10;
- (d) There is no child-specific pretrial detention limit.

46. **In the light of its general comment No. 10 (2007) on children's rights in juvenile justice, the Committee urges the State party to bring its juvenile justice system fully into line with the Convention and other relevant international standards. In particular, it reiterates its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SGP/CO/2-3, para. 69) and recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Consider regularly reviewing the Penal Code with a view to raising the age of criminal responsibility to an internationally accepted standard and give the child the benefit of the doubt when age is in dispute;**
- (b) **Speed up the adoption of the proposed amendments to the Children and Young Persons Act with a view to raising the upper age limit of a child to 18 years;**
- (c) **Abolish the sentence of life imprisonment for children under the age of 18 and promptly review the files of all prisoners serving a life sentence for crimes committed when under 18 years of age, with a view to ensuring their early release;**
- (d) **Ensure that children currently sentenced to life imprisonment receive education, treatment and care aimed at their release, reintegration and ability to play a constructive role in society;**
- (e) **Prohibit and criminalize corporal punishment as a sentence for child offenders through the adoption of legislative, policy and administrative amendments;**
- (f) **Ensure that pretrial detention of children is applied only as a measure of last resort and that its application is subject to strict time limitations and regular review by a judge.**

Follow-up to the Committee's previous concluding observations and recommendations concerning the implementation of the Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict

47. The Committee takes note of the information provided by the delegation that the State party is considering reducing the notice period required by underage volunteers in the armed forces to request release to one month. The Committee remains nonetheless concerned that:

- (a) The minimum age for voluntary recruitment, set at 16 years and 6 months, has not been changed;
- (b) The State party has not established a complaints mechanism for members of the armed forces outside the Ministry of Defence;
- (c) Underage volunteers between 16 and a half and 18 years of age continue to be subject to military law;
- (d) The State party does not consider it necessary to amend its legislation with regard to offences under regulation 40 of the Enlistment Regulations;
- (e) The State party has not amended its legislation to ensure that it can exercise extrajudicial jurisdiction over or provide for extradition for all offences under the Optional Protocol.

48. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Consider reviewing its position and raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces to 18 years in order to promote the protection of children through an overall higher legal standard;**
- (b) **Expediently establish an independent complaints mechanism outside the Ministry of Defence for members of the armed forces;**

(c) Urgently reduce the current release period of three months for underage volunteers;

(d) Reconsider increasing penalties, by amending legislation, for recruitment of persons below the age of 16 years and 6 months and for permitting enlistees below 18 years of age to take a direct part in hostilities;

(e) Reconsider amending its legislation to ensure extraterritorial jurisdiction over and extradition for all of the offences under the Optional Protocol.

J. Ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention

49. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, ratify the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

K. Ratification of international human rights instruments

50. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, consider ratifying the following core human rights instruments:

(a) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(b) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

(c) The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

(d) The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;

(e) The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

L. Cooperation with regional bodies

51. The Committee recommends that the State party cooperate with, among others, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children.

IV. Implementation and reporting

A. Follow-up and dissemination

52. The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations are fully implemented. The Committee also recommends that the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports, the written replies to the list of issues and the present concluding observations be made widely available in the languages of the country.

B. National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up

53. The Committee recommends that the State party establish a standing government structure to coordinate and prepare reports to and engage with international and regional human rights mechanisms, and to coordinate and track national follow-up to and implementation of treaty obligations and the recommendations and decisions emanating from the mechanisms. The Committee

emphasizes that such a structure should be adequately and continuously supported by dedicated staff and should have the capacity to consult systematically with civil society.

C. Next report

54. The Committee invites the State party to submit its sixth periodic report by 3 November 2024 and to include therein information on the follow-up to the present concluding observations. The report should be in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines adopted on 31 January 2014 (CRC/C/58/Rev.3) and should not exceed 21,200 words (General Assembly resolution 68/268, para. 16). In the event that a report exceeding the established word limit is submitted, the State party will be asked to shorten the report in accordance with the above-mentioned resolution. If the State party is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, translation thereof for the purposes of consideration by the treaty body cannot be guaranteed.

55. The Committee also invites the State party to submit a core document, not exceeding 42,400 words, in accordance with the requirements for the common core document contained in the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6, chap. I) and paragraph 16 of General Assembly resolution 68/268.
