

**ORAL PRESENTATION TO THE CEDAW COMMITTEE  
FROM SINGAPORE NATIONAL NGO,  
THE SINGAPORE COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS (SCWO)**

Thank you Madame Chair, for giving us the opportunity to address the Committee.

I am Wee Wan Joo, President of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations or SCWO, and I would like to present these comments with Immediate Past President Tisa Ng. The SCWO is the national umbrella body of women's organisations in Singapore and the government's NGO partner for the advancement of women and the implementation of CEDAW. In preparing this commentary, we have consulted our 53 member organisations which have a collective membership of 150,000 women from all walks of life. One of our member organisations, the Association of Women for Action and Research, is also here to present its own independent report.

Madame Chair, in our commentary submitted in writing, we have addressed Articles 2 and 16; Article 5; Article 7, Article 11, and Article 13. We wish to take this opportunity to highlight three overarching concerns.

1. The lack of a rights based approach in the implementation of CEDAW.
2. Inadequate dissemination of information about women's rights and the State's obligations under CEDAW.
3. The lack of women in national leadership.

And now Tisa Ng will elaborate on these three points.

On the first point, SCWO acknowledges that the condition of women has improved along with rapid development in Singapore. Women have been given access to opportunities such as education and employment. However, this has been in response to economic imperatives – so that women can participate in the workforce in accordance to national interest, and have had very little to do with the advancement of women as sovereign persons and citizens.

Since Singapore became a signatory of CEDAW, a series of blatantly discriminatory administrative practices have been removed, such as a quota on admission of women into medical school. However, no legislation has been put in place which enshrines the equality of women in a clear and unequivocal manner. This is particularly regrettable since discrimination on the basis of race, religion and place of birth is expressly prohibited in the constitution. Although there were special historical circumstances why this was so, there is no reason for the continued absence of gender in this fundamental document.

On the second point, on dissemination of information about CEDAW, SCWO feels that much remains to be done. Singapore has an excellent record of very effective and comprehensive national education programmes in promoting specific values and behaviour. There can be little doubt as to both capacity and resources. Given that education and dissemination of information about CEDAW is a responsibility of the state parties, SCWO feels that a lot more needs to be done than the consultations surrounding each reporting cycle and putting the relevant documents on the website.

On the third point on the lack of women at national leadership, SCWO is of the view that special measures should be adopted to accelerate the increase of women in leadership positions,

particularly in state matters. The mechanism of Group Representation Constituencies already exists in Singapore to ensure that racial minorities are represented. Women, who make up over 50% of the population, are severely underrepresented, and yet there are no specific measures to redress this imbalance. Given deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and the multiple roles expected of women, the state should openly and actively champion the participation of women in leadership positions.