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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

18th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Plenary on Singapore

Article 19

Oral Statement Delivered by Ms Braema Mathiaparanam of MARUAH,
Singapore

Thursday 22nd September, 2011; 1200 to 1pm

Thank you, Madam President. I am making this statement as a representative of Article 19 and as MARUAH, a human rights NGO in Singapore.

Madam President, I speak as civil society working in Singapore. Much has changed in Singapore since the State under Review event on May 6th. The General Election on May 7th was a watershed. The ruling party - People's Action Party - saw its popularity dive to an all time low of 60.14 per cent, and it lost a Group Representation Constituency of five candidates (who are voted in on a single ballot) to the Opposition, and lost two Cabinet Ministers in the process.

Last month, we had the Presidential Elections. An unprecedented four candidates contested, fighting hard, before former Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Tony Tan became President as a majority winner with 35 per cent of the votes.

Post-election analyses (done by think-tanks, political parties, civil society) reflect a chasm between the people and the government. Much of the dissatisfaction centres around social security issues, lack of – perceived or real - adequate protection against foreigners taking jobs, access to affordable housing and a frustration at still being 'nannied' by the government which limits political and civil liberties for the citizens, for their own good and based on fear.

My colleagues and I believe that Singapore is poised for change. People want more space, more say in policy-making discussions, and more freedom to express themselves. There is a definite expressed change in the relationship between the government and the people.

Given this backdrop, Madam President, it is disheartening that after these elections and after acknowledging a readiness to change – the government has not supported the civil and political liberty recommendations (38 of the 114 in the Working Group on the UPR report ((A/HRC/18/11), including ratifying International Conventions (ICCPR, ICESCR) and the Optional Protocol, remove reservations in CEDAW and CRC , work towards setting up a national human rights commission, review defamation laws, Newspaper Printing and Publishing Act, laws for preventive detention, death penalty. (Recommendations 96.22 – 96.24; 96.1- 96.18)

The government remains resolute in this area, giving little. For example, last week, Malaysia announced that it will abolish its Internal Security Act, the main source of its powers of preventive detention. Just one day later, the Singapore government announced that it will not do the same, even though our legislation is historically linked to Malaysia's.

Thus much remains as status quo. The elections may have changed many things, but certainly not our civil liberties in Singapore.

Please do know that we congratulate our government for moving towards ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and setting up a multi-agency taskforce to study the Palermo Protocol.

Please also do know that the government of Singapore has done many things right. They have succeeded at many things. Nevertheless Singaporeans remain frustrated at the continued stifling of rights, by a government that is still too cautious.

MARUAH urges our government to work towards civil and political liberties as a priority focus for the next UPR. We will play our part. I thank all members of the HRC community for their valuable contributions in this discussion.