



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Consideration of reports of States parties

List of issues in relation to the report submitted by Singapore under article 8, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

Addendum

Replies of Singapore to the list of issues*

[Date received: 30 July 2014]

Introduction

Singapore signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) on 7 September 2000. Singapore ratified the OPAC on 11 December 2008 and it came into force for Singapore on 11 January 2009. Singapore submitted its initial report on 15 December 2011, as required under Article 8, Paragraph 1, of the OPAC. It covered the period from Singapore's ratification of the OPAC in 2008 to 2010. Singapore received a list of queries in relation to Singapore's initial report from the Committee on the Rights of the Child in February 2014. The present report constitutes Singapore's response to the issues raised by the Committee. The response was jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Social and Family Development, Singapore Customs and the Attorney-General's Chambers of Singapore.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

Question 1

In the light of the information provided in paragraph 13 of the State party's report (CRC/C/OPAC/SGP/1) that the minimum age for registration for compulsory enlistment into the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is set at 16 years and 6 months to allow for sufficient time to carry out administrative procedures, please explain how the State party ensures compliance with the requirements under article 3 of the Optional Protocol, including the independent verification of the age of recruits, the informed consent of parents or legal guardians, and the voluntary nature of the enlistment. Please also indicate the number of children under 18 years registered for the compulsory recruitment over the past three years.

1.1. Paragraph 13 of Singapore's initial report addresses the minimum age for registration for compulsory enlistment. Under the Enlistment Act (Cap. 93), the minimum age for compulsory enlistment into the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) for all male Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents is 18 years. The minimum age for registration for compulsory enlistment is 16 years and 6 months. This allows for sufficient time to carry out the administrative procedures required of fit-to-serve male Singaporeans upon their reaching 18 years of age. These administrative procedures involve the documentation process of the pre-enlistees' personal details, arrangements for them to perform pre-enlistment medical screening, as well as the various aptitude tests. In accordance with Singapore's obligations under Article 2 of the Optional Protocol, while male Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents may be registered before 18 years of age, the compulsory enlistment of these men will not take place until after they reach 18 years of age.

1.2. For voluntary enlistment, under the SAF (Volunteers) Regulations (Cap. 295, Reg. 7), National Service (NS)-liable males who have reached 16 years and 6 months of age and who wish to enlist for full-time NS early may apply to do so as a volunteer through the Voluntary Early Enlistment Scheme (VEES).

1.3. In accordance with Singapore's obligations under Article 3, there are numerous checks put in place with respect to voluntary enlistment. Written consent from a parent or legal guardian of the VEES applicant under the age of 18 years is required under Clause 4(3) of the Singapore Armed Forces (Volunteers) Regulations (Cap. 295, Reg. 7). In addition, an interview will be conducted with the potential enlistee, together with his parent or legal guardian, to explain and ensure that they fully understand the conditions of voluntary enlistment. Individuals under 18 years of age who wish to be enlisted on a voluntary basis will be put through comprehensive medical examinations, aptitude assessments and physical proficiency tests to ascertain their ability to cope with full-time military training. Only those who are certified fit through these examinations are allowed to be enlisted. Each application will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Central Manpower Base within the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF).

1.4. National identification records are used to verify the age of potential enlistees. All Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents are required to register for their Identity Cards (ICs) within one year of attaining the age of 15 years. The IC serves as the national identification record. Section 31¹ of the Enlistment Act (Cap. 93) provides for the

¹ **Calculation of age**

For the purpose of calculation of age under this Act, the following provisions shall apply:

(a) where the month in which a person was born is not entered in his identity card, he shall be deemed to be born on 1st July;

(b) where the day of the month on which a person was born is not entered in his identity card, he shall be deemed to be born on the first day of the month; and

calculation of the age for enlistment, where the exact year, month, or day of month in which a person was born is not entered in his identity card.

1.5. Every year, about 20,000 eligible Singaporean and Permanent Resident males are registered for NS. They are required to register for NS when they reach 17 years and 6 months of age, so as to allow sufficient time to complete the required administrative procedures. Almost all NS-eligible males are registered for NS before the age of 18. However, those who are not volunteers are only enlisted after they turn 18.

Question 2

Please indicate whether there is a complaints mechanism accessible by children in the Ministry of Defence or if there are other mechanisms for monitoring children's welfare and investigating complaints by children who are registered or who wish to be enlisted under the Voluntary Early Enlistment Scheme.

2.1. The SAF adopts various measures to help servicemen adjust to military service. Multiple channels of providing feedback and complaints are available, and feedback is welcomed.

2.2. At the point of enlistment, servicemen are briefed on the mechanisms available to seek redress or complaints. Servicemen can therefore seek redress by first approaching their immediate superior commander. Should attempts to seek redress for grievances prove unsuccessful at the unit level, servicemen may also seek redress via the MINDEF Feedback Unit, with the details as follows:

Tel:	1800-7608844 (MINDEF Feedback Line)
Website:	http://www.mindef.gov.sg
Email:	MINDEF_Feedback_Unit@defence.gov.sg

2.3. National servicemen also have a dedicated feedback channel via contact@ns.sg for them to provide feedback.

2.4. All recruits are interviewed once every one to three months by their immediate superior. Avenues for counselling are made available throughout full-time NS. Should servicemen have or be identified to have serious adjustment, family, relationship, personality or psychological issues and require special assistance, they can be referred to the Psychological Care Centre by their immediate superiors or Medical Officers, or they may approach the counsellors themselves for help. Servicemen can also call the 24-hour SAF Counselling Hotline when in distress.

(c) where the year in which a person was born is not entered in his identity card, the proper authority may order him to undergo medical examinations and produce evidence in respect of his age and shall decide on his year of birth.

Question 3

Please explain whether children under 18 years registered through the Voluntary Early Enlistment Scheme undergo military training before they officially begin serving in the National Service (NS) and if that is the case, please clarify whether their status is military or civilian and whether they have a right to leave at any time if they wish. If so, please indicate whether these principles are codified and how they are enforced.

3.1. The voluntary enlistment of NS-liable males who have reached 16 years and 6 months under VEES is governed by the SAF (Volunteers) Regulations (Cap. 295, Reg. 7).

3.2. Children under 18 years registered through VEES do not undergo military training before they officially begin serving NS. All NS-liable males, who have registered for NS but yet to be enlisted, are of civilian status.

3.3. All enlistees, including those enlisted on a voluntary basis, will first undergo Basic Military Training, followed by posting to suitable vocations for further training. Those enlisted on a voluntary basis will serve in various vocations. They will not however take a direct part in hostilities. These volunteers will serve the same period of full-time NS as per other Full-Time National Servicemen (NSFs) who are enlisted on or after 18 years of age. The period of volunteer service under VEES will cease on the day the person turns 18 years of age and will count towards fulfilment of full-time NS, provided that the person does not terminate his volunteer service prematurely. This provision can be found in Regulation 10 of the SAF (Volunteers) Regulations. Upon enlistment, the volunteers are of military status and will be subject to all applicable laws and regulations, including orders and directives issued by the SAF.

3.4. An individual who has entered NS under VEES may request early release from volunteer service upon giving 3 months' notice in writing. Such information is made available to these enlistees in the Terms and Conditions of the VEES application form given to them at the point at which they wish to apply for voluntary enlistment. Provision for release from volunteer service can be found in Regulation 14 of the SAF (Volunteers) Regulations.

Question 4

Please inform the Committee about any public awareness programmes, including campaigns conducted by the State party, to ensure that the public in general, and children in particular, are adequately informed about the provisions of the Optional Protocol, including the minimum age for voluntary enlistment of children into the Singapore Armed Forces.

4.1. Singapore announced its ratification of the OPAC through a media release, which comprised information regarding the obligations of the OPAC on 6 January 2009. A media release was also issued on 15 Dec 2011 about Singapore's submission of the Initial Report to the Committee. Information on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child can be found on the website (www.msf.gov.sg).

4.2. Singapore's amendments to its Enlistment Regulations (Cap. 93, Reg. 1) and SAF (Volunteers) Regulations (Cap. 295, Reg. 7) to implement our obligations under the OPAC were published on the Government Gazette on 7 July 2008.

4.3. NS-liable males are sent an NS information leaflet upon reaching 16 years and 6 months of age. The leaflet states that under the Enlistment Act (Cap. 93), all male Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents can register for NS upon reaching the age of 16½ years, and pre-enlistees who have registered will be enlisted for full-time NS at the earliest opportunity after reaching the age of 18 years. The leaflet also provides information about NS to prepare pre-enlistees for full-time NS.

4.4. Engagement initiatives like SAF camp visits and dialogue sessions with senior SAF officers are also organised as part of the efforts to prepare them for enlistment. Potential enlistees may also refer to the NS Portal (www.ns.sg) for more information.

Question 5

Please state whether the legislation of the State party prohibits and fully criminalizes the recruitment and use of children in hostilities by State and non-State armed groups both in time of war and of peace. Please also indicate the penalties for this type of crime.

5.1. Regulation 4 of the SAF (Volunteers) Regulations (Cap. 295, Reg. 7) prohibits any person below 18 years of age applying for enlistment as a volunteer from taking a direct part in hostilities until he has attained the age of 18 years.

5.2. Regulation 14 of the Enlistment Regulations (Cap. 93, Reg. 1) permits any person below the age of 18 years but not below the age of 16 years and 6 months to apply to be enlisted in regular service in special cases. The safeguard under regulation 14 is that such an enlisted person shall not be permitted to take a direct part in hostilities until he has attained the age of 18 years.

5.3. Recruitment of persons below the age of 16 years and 6 months into regular service and permitting enlistees below 18 years of age to take a direct part in hostilities are offences under regulation 40 of the Enlistment Regulations (Cap. 93, Reg. 1). The punishment for such offences is a fine not exceeding S\$2,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both. There is no statute of limitations for these offences. Attempts to commit these offences or abetment of the commission of these offences may also be dealt with by relying on Section 511 and Section 109 of the Penal Code.

5.4. Singapore's private security industry comprises Auxiliary Police Officers employed by the Auxiliary Police Forces, and unarmed security officers employed by private security agencies. While officers employed by the Auxiliary Police Forces may bear arms, the Auxiliary Police General Directive, issued under Section 89(3) of the Police Force Act (Cap. 235), stipulates that a person has to be at least 18 years of age before he can be appointed as an Auxiliary Police Officer. Approval from the Singapore Police Force's Police Licensing & Regulatory Department (PLRD) must also be obtained before an individual can be appointed as an Auxiliary Police Officer.

5.5. Employment of an Auxiliary Police Officer without prior approval is an offence under Section 92 of the Police Force Act, and the responsible persons are liable to a maximum fine of \$1,000 or to an imprisonment term not exceeding 3 months or both. Similarly, the PLRD regulates the employment of unarmed security officers by private security agencies. Sections 14 and 16 of the Private Security Industry Act (Cap. 250A) make it an offence for anyone to work as a private security officer without a licence.

Question 6

Please provide information on the procedures used to identify as quickly as possible any child refugees, asylum seekers or migrants who have been or are at risk of being recruited or used in armed conflicts abroad. Please also provide information on action taken to provide for their physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation and to promote their reintegration into society.

6.1. Singapore has not been involved in any armed conflict since its independence in 1965. For SAF troops deployed as part of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, if they encounter cases of possible child refugees, asylum seekers or migrants who have been or are at risk of being recruited or used in armed conflicts abroad, they will refer such cases to the appropriate UN agency which has been mandated to oversee such matters such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in consultation with the Peacekeeping Force HQ. Such matters may also be referred to other humanitarian organisations/agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who may be operating in the area of peacekeeping operations.

6.2. The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) is the lead agency on child protection and works closely with government agencies and non-government agencies to provide timely interventions, including services and programmes, to children who may be victims of exploitation or abuse. Active steps would be taken to ensure the well-being of the children, aid their physical and emotional recovery.

6.3. In the situation where unaccompanied minors seeking asylum or refugee children are found within Singapore territory, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) can facilitate their re-settlement to a third country by working with the UNHCR. The ICA will work with the UNHCR on the resettlement by facilitating their access to such minors for the purposes of interviews and medical examinations. Such minors would be referred to MSF for the provision of accommodation and other welfare support pending repatriation to a third country.

Question 7

In the light of the information that the State party is an exporter of arms, please indicate whether it has adopted any legislation to prohibit the trade and export of arms, including small arms and light weapons, to countries where children are or may be recruited or used in an armed conflict. With reference to paragraph 29 of the report, please state whether the State party has banned the export of any type of weapon to countries that use children in hostilities and if so, please indicate the number of countries in which a ban of this type has been introduced under the Regulation of Imports and Exports Regulations.

7.1. As noted in the initial report, Singapore does not have national legislation that specifically prohibits the trade and export of small and light arms as well as military assistance to countries where children may be involved in armed conflict. The Regulation of Imports and Exports Regulations (Cap. 272A, Reg. 1) empowers Singapore to impose trade restrictions to ensure compliance with restrictions on arms trading mandated through UN Security Council Resolutions. Where the UN Security Council has imposed restrictions on trade and export of small and light arms against countries that use children in hostilities, Singapore implements these through the Regulation of Imports and Exports Regulations. As of the date of writing, such restrictions have been introduced under the Regulation of

Imports and Export Regulations against Liberia, Sierra Leone, Republic of Iraq, Sudan, Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo to give effect to UN Security Council Resolutions relating to these countries.
