

Concrete proposals to tackle women's issues to be presented in early 2022: PM Lee



The Conversations on Singapore Women's Development initiative was launched last September. PHOTO: ST FILE



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SINGAPORE - A White Paper with "concrete proposals" to tackle issues concerning women will be presented in Parliament early next year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Saturday (Sept 18).

The Government will study the views it has received on issues brought up during a year-long review of issues concerning women to develop and implement these proposals, he said.

PM Lee was speaking at the closing session of Conversations on Singapore Women's Development, where he outlined three broad areas in which Government policies and programmes can help level the playing field for women.

These are: more equal workplace opportunities, more caregiver support and increased protection for women, both physically and online.

In addition, a garden at Dhoby Ghaut Green will be dedicated to the women of Singapore to honour and celebrate their pioneering spirit and contributions, said PM Lee.

The proposal was put forward by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO), and includes the naming of public spaces such as gardens and roads to reflect the central role that Singapore women have played in society and nation.

The Conversations on Singapore Women's Development initiative was launched in September last year and 160 conversations have since been conducted, involving more than 5,700 participants.

"As our society advances, so must our mindsets. It's not something easily done overnight but we must keep on pushing. Our policies and programmes will nudge behaviour, gradually change attitudes and enable us to make lasting progress," said PM Lee.

"We must continue to strengthen the ethos of fairness and justice in our society where men and women partner each other as equals, progress together and pursue their aspirations freely and to the fullest, and where we take care of the vulnerable amongst us."

He said that women's responsibilities at home can spillover to affect their career progression, with some employers reluctant to hire, promote or groom female employees, and in some cases it is serious enough to constitute workplace discrimination.

He noted that it is "unjust" and employers should not "let prejudices become obstacles to women's progress".

Besides legislating fair treatment for female employees under the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices, PM Lee said more will be done to improve childcare arrangements to make it easier for mothers to go back to work, or better still, not leave the workforce in the first place.



PM Lee Hsien Loong at the closing session for Conversations on Singapore Women's Development. PHOTO: MCI

The Ministry of Health (MOH) will also look at enhancing the Home Caregiving Grant, which helps families to alleviate the cost of care, to better support women who have caregiving responsibilities as well as expanding options to support the well-being of caregivers, said PM Lee.

PM Lee said that the physical safety and sense of security in Singapore cannot be taken for granted, and high standards of law and order must be maintained.

A Bill to toughen punishments for three sex crimes was passed in Parliament earlier this week.

"As a society, we must cultivate an environment where people respond with empathy and support when something bad like this happens," said PM Lee.

"Victims must be able to seek help easily, and without suffering additional distress. More importantly, victims must not have cause to fear that they themselves will be blamed or shamed for what has happened to them, and therefore suffer in silence."

The key themes were echoed by Minister of State for Education and Social and Family Development Sun Xueling, who is among three political office-holders leading the review.

The other two are Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth and Trade and Industry Low Yen Ling, and Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam. All three took part in Saturday's virtual dialogue.

Ms Junie Foo, president of the SCWO, said combating gender inequality calls for symbolic and tangible changes.

Said Ms Foo: "Although the status of Singapore women has improved by leaps and bounds, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that women are treated equally in every realm of life. Breaking out of long-held traditional stereotypes of men and women is a long road ahead."