

TRANSCRIPT OF CLOSING REMARKS BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CO-CHAIR OF SUNLIGHT AFA, AT THE SUNLIGHT AFA “A CONVERSATION ON PROTECTING WOMEN & GIRLS FROM ONLINE HARMS” WEBINAR, FRIDAY 25 MARCH 2022

Introduction

1. Good evening everyone. I am happy to join the Sunlight AfA’s second webinar. The first webinar was held on 8 February 2022, and was targeted at parents and families. This time, we wanted to focus on youths as they are digital natives and spend more time online compared to older age groups.

2. I would like to thank everyone for making time to attend this evening’s webinar. I would also like to show my appreciation to our speakers – Dr Chew Han Ei, Ms Nisha Rai, Mr Jamin Tan, Prof Lim Sun Sun, Ms Simran Toor – and to our moderator Mr Joel Lim.

Journey to Tackle Online Harms

3. Let me share some thoughts on our journey so far in terms of tackling online harms. We embarked on this journey at the beginning of 2021, amid growing concerns of technology-facilitated sexual harassment and non-consensual publication of intimate images online.

4. Since February 2021, we have met and held more than 10 conversations, with over 300 stakeholders from diverse backgrounds – including those from corporate firms, technology companies, community organisations, the legal community, academia, the media industry, parents and youths.

5. A key recommendation that came up from these conversations was the need to develop support mechanisms and infrastructure for victims of online harms. This entailed:

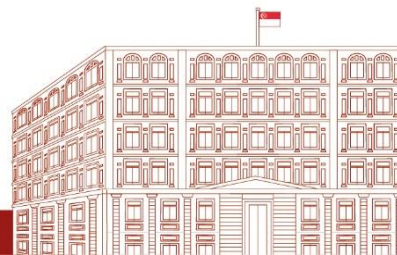
- i. Providing help to victims of online harms by making available tools, knowledge and assistance;
- ii. Creating a safer space online for all by providing support, advice, and education; and
- iii. Helping to shape norms around safe and responsible use of digital devices and online spaces.

Baseline assessment being built up

6. I am happy that with the sharing of the findings of the online poll this evening, our baseline assessment is being built up. This will help the effort. Why do we need this baseline assessment? This is to give greater clarity to the follow-up actions that the AfA will be recommending and involved in implementing. We need a baseline assessment of the scale and extent of online harms experienced in Singapore.

7. Measuring improvements against the baseline is the only way to know whether our women and girls are feeling more confident online over time, and whether we are closing the digital safety gap. This survey helps us build that baseline.

8. I want to thank the AfA members involved in the research workstream – in particular, the coordinators Prof Lim Sun Sun and Dr Elmie Nekmat. I also want to thank Dr Chew Han Ei for



spearheading this study and helping to bring it about. I would also like to take this opportunity to also thank Ms Carol Loi for organising this webinar and Ms Surabhi for helping with the webinar poster.

Key findings affirm the direction of Sunlight AfA's work

9. Let me share some thoughts on the key findings of the online poll. I feel that they do affirm the direction of Sunlight AfA's work. Some of the key findings were:

- Close to half of the respondents (47%) have personally experienced one or more types of online harms.
- Respondents aged 15-35 form the majority of those who personally experienced online harms.
- That women and girls tend to feel less safe from online harms and are less aware of avenues for seeking help.
- 43% of respondents felt that stricter enforcement of relevant laws was the most effective solution to reduce gender-based online harms. Meanwhile, 35% of respondents felt that companies and platforms had the most room for improvement in tackling the issue of gender-based online harms.

10. These findings closely mirror the calls that the AfA has been making and also signal the desire for enhanced measures to protect users against online harms.

Some of Sunlight AfA's calls have already been taken on board by Government

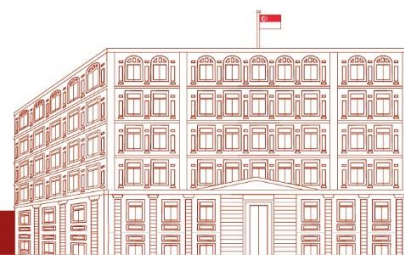
11. I am glad to share that some of Sunlight AfA's calls have already been taken on board by the Government. During the webinar, we discussed quite extensively the finding on expectations for stakeholders especially internet platforms to do more in combating online harms. What should doing more look like? The AfA is very heartened that some of our calls have already made their way into the Government's work plan.

12. In particular, MCI's recent announcement at the Committee of Supply (COS) debate on the intent to introduce Codes of Practice to enhance online safety in three new areas is, in my view, very encouraging:

- i. Child safety to minimise exposure of children and young persons to harmful online content
- ii. User reporting to promote prompt follow-up action by technology platforms
- iii. Platform accountability where platforms are required to provide information on what they are doing to keep users safe.

13. MCI will be conducting consultations with the public as these new Codes are developed. I encourage all of you who are in this webinar and who are tracking this issue to take part in these consultations. I think that this will bring about significant progress.

14. We recognise that the task of tackling online harms has to go beyond legislations and policies. It is equally critical to equip Singaporeans with the knowledge and skills to confidently



navigate the digital space. I feel that our speakers at this evening's webinar are spot on when they say that this is a whole-of-society approach. This is also something that I believe in.

15. I am also pleased to launch the Sunlight AfA website which provides updates on AfA's events, and resources to address online dangers and risks. I welcome everyone to visit the website and find out more about the AfA's work and to join us in this task of tackling online harms. I would also like to thank our volunteer, Ms Krystal Lim, for putting the website together.

16. We are also planning another meeting with the AfA members in April so that we can continue to put our ideas into action. This has been a fruitful evening! I'm glad that our AfA members have had the opportunity to showcase their findings, and that we have had the opportunity to hear from and also address questions from our webinar participants.

17. Thank you for caring about the issue, and also for giving us the affirmation that we are on the right track. To those who will be attending our meeting in April, I'll see you then. Thanks everyone once again for being here. Good night and stay safe.

