



Singapore must release British Journalist sentenced for the publication of death penalty book

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ADPAN, a regional network campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty in Asia and the Pacific, is today calling for the release of Alan Shadrake, a British journalist and author sentenced and fined for criticising Singapore's death penalty laws.

Shadrake is the author of "Once a Jolly Hangman: Singapore's Justice in the Dock," which asserts that Singapore applies double standards and unequal justice in the application of the death penalty and uses it disproportionately against poor and disadvantaged people. The book highlights cases and includes interviews with a retired executioner, lawyers, police and others.

Shadrake, 76, who is in poor health and suffering from a heart condition, was sentenced on 16 November to six weeks' imprisonment and a fine of S\$20,000. He now also faces a separate sentencing decision for criminal defamation following a complaint brought by the Singapore Media Development Authority in relation to the publication of his book. He has been represented by ADPAN member M. Ravi.

Shadrake was first arrested and charged on 18 July and released on bail two days later. On 3 November, the High Court ruled that Shadrake was guilty of contempt of court. The high court judge rejected "fair criticism" arguments. In his written judgment, the judge concluded: "We are constitutionally bound to protect every citizen's right to engage in such debate...But when such debate goes beyond the limits of fair criticism the law will step in...It does so only to ensure the public's confidence in the administration of justice does not falter and this in the final analysis is the surest guarantee that justice will in fact be administered in accordance with the law."

Shadrake has remained defiant since charges were first brought against him. "This story is never going away. I'll keep it on the boil for as long as I live," Shadrake told The Guardian newspaper following the High Court decision last week.

"The Constitution says one thing, in practice it is different," Shadrake told ADPAN. "The courts must be blamed for this sad state of affairs. They rarely interpret the law in favour of the accused, though I feel things are slowly changing. One day, we may still have justice in the true sense of the word. Justice must be compassionate and it must be fair. It must endeavour to seek out the truth. It must balance the rights of the accused and the protection of society."

The publicity around the case, and the decision to sentence Shadrake, has undermined Singapore's image, both across the region and internationally. ADPAN says this is both unfortunate and unnecessary at time when the world is turning its back on the death penalty.

ADPAN says Asia and the Pacific have seen significant moves towards abolition, including the introduction of a moratorium in Mongolia and a reduction in the number of death sentences across the region. On 11 November, the United Nation's Third Committee adopted a resolution on a moratorium which gathered more support from UN Member States than in the previous resolution in 2008, particularly from the Asia and Pacific region where seven countries positively changed their vote. This confirms a regional and worldwide trend towards abolition.

Background

ADPAN is an independent, cross-regional network of 50 members from 23 countries, primarily from Asia and the Pacific, which campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty across the region. It is not linked to any political party or religion and is independent of all governments. Its members include lawyers, NGO's and activists.

<http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/adpan>

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