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Singapore: Proposed change a welcome step Government needs to do more to abolish mandatory death penalty for all crimes

Amnesty International and the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) welcomes the Singaporean Government's move towards putting an end to the mandatory death sentencing for drug trafficking and homicide cases, and the moratorium on executions in place until proposed changes in the law are enacted.

Mandatory death sentences are prohibited under international law and Amnesty International and ADPAN therefore call on the Government of Singapore to abolish mandatory death sentencing unconditionally.

Mandatory death sentences prevent judges from exercising their discretion and from considering all extenuating circumstances in a case. International human rights law prohibits mandatory death sentences as they have been found to constitute arbitrary deprivation of life and cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. Many courts and judicial bodies around the world have ruled mandatory death sentencing as unconstitutional.

These proposed changes are key in saving the lives of those who are currently in death row in Singapore, particularly the case of Malaysian Yong Vui Kong, who is facing imminent execution. Yong Vui Kong, who was 19 years old when arrested in 2007, was given a mandatory death sentence for possession of 47g of heroin, which under Singapore's existing laws amounted to drug trafficking and warranted mandatory death penalty. Yong Vui Kong was a courier and has identified in a police statement the alleged mastermind of the operation who instigated him to transport the controlled drugs to Singapore. The charges against the Singaporean alleged to have masterminded the crime have been withdrawn. Yong Vui Kong's case has attracted international attention and concern from the diplomatic community.

Amnesty International and the Anti Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) joins local groups in Malaysia and Singapore in calling for the Singaporean Government to commute Yong Vui Kong's sentence.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, believing that the death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International understands the devastating impact of violent crime and sympathizes with victims of crime and their families. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments. Victims of crime are doubly victimised by unfair trial procedures which can result in the innocent being executed and the real perpetrators never being brought to justice.