AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PUBLIC STATEMENT

Singapore: Free 16-year-old prisoner of conscience Amos Yee

The Singapore authorities must immediately and unconditionally release teenager Amos Yee, who is facing a minimum of 18 months of reformative training after criticising the late Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew online. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. As he is a minor, authorities must also ensure that his treatment is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Singapore is a State party.

Amos Yee was found guilty on 12 May by a Singapore court for "transmitting obscene materials", under penal code section 292(1)(a) which is punishable by a fine, and for violating penal code section 298, "uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious or racial feelings of any person", punishable by three years in prison and a fine.

He is currently in remand at Block 7 of the Institute of Mental Health in Buangkok, Singapore. He was first arrested on 29 March after he uploaded a YouTube video entitled "Lee Kuan Yew is dead", referring to the late Singapore Prime Minister, and for posting an image featuring the superimposed photos of Lee Kuan Yew and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on the heads of two cartoon figures having sex.

The next hearing in Amos Yee's case is on 6 July 2015, when a court is expected to decide whether he will be sentenced to a minimum of 18 months reformative training or up to two years' mandatory treatment for people with psychiatric conditions.

Amos Yee has been remanded several times as the courts explore his sentencing options. His defence rejected the prosecution's proposal for a punishment of probation and reformative training. According to the Office of the UN Commissioner on Human Rights, reformative training is "akin to detention and usually applied to juvenile offenders involved in serious crimes" and was referred to in a recent Singapore district court decision as "incarcerative in nature and should be imposed cautiously."

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Amos Yee. The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. Under international human rights law and standards, restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must be the exception rather than the rule. What Amos Yee said was peacefully expressed and was clearly not grounds for criminalization. He has been held for nothing but exercising his right to freedom of expression, and Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Pending his release, authorities in Singapore must also ensure that Amos Yee is safe from any security threats and is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated. Singapore has a duty to ensure that Amos Yee's best interests under the Convention on the Rights of the Child are given priority, including ensuring that he has unconditional access to his parents. As stated in the Convention, Singapore also must ensure that his specific needs as a juvenile are taken into account.

The case of Amos Yee highlights the wider, restrictive environment for freedom of expression in Singapore. Opposition activists, former prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders continue to express their concerns about the restricted space for public discussion in the country, and the

government's tight control of critical debate. The government persists in using defamation suits against critics, and the media continues to be tightly controlled through restrictive laws on censorship. Amnesty International urges the Singapore authorities to repeal or review and amend all laws which impose unlawful restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, to ensure that they comply with international human rights law and standards.