

# **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

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### **Singapore: human rights review must lead to improvement in human rights protection**

Amnesty International encourages the authorities of Singapore and all UN Member States to make the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Singapore at the UN Human Rights Council on 27 January a meaningful opportunity to improve the country's human rights situation. The organization further calls on the authorities of Singapore to follow up on the review and introduce critical reforms to its laws and practices to ensure the respect and protection of human rights in the country.

Following the country's first UPR review in 2011, Amnesty International welcomed the initial progress Singapore made in reviewing the Misuse of Drugs Act 2012 and the Penal Code Act 2012 to impose a moratorium on all executions, as recommended during the UPR.<sup>1</sup>

However, the country's reforms on the death penalty have not gone far enough and, to date, the death penalty is still imposed and carried out in contravention of international law and standards. Amnesty International is gravely concerned that executions were resumed in 2014 and continue to be carried out. Reports received by Amnesty International also indicate that two of the executions were carried out in 2015 without any public announcement.

The death penalty continues to be used for offences other than the "most serious crimes", the only category of offences for which the death penalty can be imposed under international law, which also sets abolition as the ultimate goal. While judges are now allowed to exercise some discretion in

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendations to establish a moratorium on executions were made by Czech Republic, Finland, France, Switzerland. See Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review-Singapore, 11 July 2011, UN document A/HRC/18/11.

deciding whether or not to impose the death penalty in particular circumstances, Amnesty International regrets that the amended legislation still retains the mandatory death penalty for intentional murder and in cases of persons convicted of drug trafficking, if specific criteria are not met, including if the defendant does not receive a certificate of cooperation from the Attorney General.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the 2012 legal reforms introduced life imprisonment and caning –a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment- as the only alternative punishment available to judges in cases in which the new sentencing discretion is allowed.

Amnesty International also urges the Singaporean authorities to use the opportunity of the UPR to make public commitments to ensure the protection of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association through legislative reform and policy changes. Several recommendations issued during the 2011 UPR related to these rights<sup>2</sup> were unfortunately not accepted by Singapore, and laws that unlawfully restrict the exercise of these rights are still being enforced. Members of the opposition, former prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders continue to express concern that the space for civil society to discuss human rights and other public issues is shrinking due to policing by the Media Development Authority (MDA).

Laws such as the Undesirable Publications Act, the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Film Act continue to be used to control the media, restrict or ban publications, films and online content in Singapore. Public gatherings and peaceful demonstrations have been restricted or banned under the 2009 Public Order Act where even a one-person protest is considered a demonstration. The Societies Act allows the government to deny registration to civil society organisations that are “contrary to national interest” or “undesirable”. Furthermore, the Sedition Act, Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) and other criminal defamation laws have been used as a tool to suppress freedom of expression and to criminalize government critics.

The Singaporean authorities must also end all detention without charge or

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendations made by Slovenia, Canada, Czech Republic and Switzerland. See Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review-Singapore, 11 July 2011, UN document A/HRC/18/11.

trial and repeal or review these laws to ensure compliance with international human rights law and standards. The Internal Security Act, initially intended to prevent subversion and suppress organized violence in Singapore, continues to be used to detain persons for up to two years without charge or trial. Such detention orders are renewed indefinitely. The Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act (CLTPA) also allows for detention without trial for up to 12 months, which may be extended indefinitely.

During its previous UPR in 2011, Singapore had accepted recommendations to “continue to strengthen efforts to protect the rights of foreign workers” and to “extend the protection afforded by labour law to the entire range of domestic workers”. Nevertheless, domestic workers continue to be excluded from the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. Amnesty International calls on the Singaporean government to amend the law to include domestic workers and ensure their protection.

Singapore is yet to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocols, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, as recommended in the previous UPR.<sup>3</sup>

Singapore’s second UPR is an opportunity for the authorities to renew and build on its human rights commitments. Amnesty International renews its calls on all UN Member States, including the authorities of Singapore, to engage meaningfully in Singapore’s review in order to significantly improve the human rights situation on the ground.

## **Background**

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process in the UN Human Rights Council which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. It provides an opportunity for States to declare what actions they have taken or are going to take to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights.

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<sup>3</sup> Recommendations to become a state party to these and other international treaties were made by Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Ghana, Japan, Kazakhstan, Poland, Slovenia, Timor-Leste, United Kingdom. See Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review-Singapore, 11 July 2011, UN document A/HRC/18/11.

**For more information, see:**

Amnesty International's Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review, June 2015: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa36/2664/2015/en/>

Amnesty International's Q&A on the UPR:  
[https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/IOR4\\_1/025/2013/en/52a38862-1175-4408-91b7-fb6c38ac4d2a/ior410252013en.pdf/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/IOR4_1/025/2013/en/52a38862-1175-4408-91b7-fb6c38ac4d2a/ior410252013en.pdf/)