

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Press Release

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### **Singapore must release British author of death penalty book**

Amnesty International is calling on the Singapore authorities to immediately release British author Alan Shadrake, who was arrested for criminal defamation on 18 July after he published a book critical of Singapore's use of the death penalty.

"Singapore uses criminal defamation laws to silence critics of government policies," said Donna Guest, Asia Pacific Deputy Director at Amnesty International. "The Singapore government should release Shadrake at once."

Shadrake launched his book *Once a Jolly Hangman: Singapore Justice in the Dock* in Singapore on 17 July. His book features an interview with a former hangman at Singapore's Changi Prison. On 18 July, Shadrake was arrested, and is currently being detained at Cantonment Police Station.

The Singapore Police Force confirmed Shadrake's arrest in a statement, which said: "He is being investigated for alleged offences of criminal defamation and other offences."

Police said the arrest was made pursuant to a complaint lodged on 16 July by the Media Development Authority (MDA) the government body responsible for censoring publications and broadcasts. According to its website, the MDA is "developing Singapore into a vibrant global media city".

"If Singapore aspires to be a global media city, it needs to respect global human rights standards for freedom of expression," said Donna Guest. "Singapore should get rid of both its criminal defamation laws and the death penalty."

Criminal defamation in Singapore carries a sentence of up to two years in prison and uncapped fines. This has had a chilling effect on freedom of speech. According to Amnesty International, peaceful criticism of government policies must never be the subject of criminal proceedings.

In 2010 the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, Frank La Rue, called on all states to abolish all criminal defamation laws, which he said could not be justified, given that non-criminal defamation laws adequately protect people's reputations.

Singapore's death penalty laws also fail to meet international human rights standards. Its drug law violates fair-trial standards by a presumption of guilt against defendants charged with drug-trafficking, which in turn carries a mandatory death penalty. This prevents judges from considering the circumstances of a case, or handing down lighter sentences.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has stated that the death penalty should under no circumstances be mandatory by law, regardless of the charges involved.

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