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Malaysia: Amnesty International pays tribute to human rights defender Karpal Singh

Amnesty International today pays tribute to prominent Malaysian human rights lawyer and former prisoner of conscience, Karpal Singh, who died earlier today.

He was a courageous and dedicated human rights defender, and his death marks the loss of an important voice in the struggle for justice and human rights in Malaysia. Amnesty International joins national and international activists in mourning his loss and expresses its deepest condolences to his family.

Karpal Singh, 74, died in a car accident in the early hours of 17 April 2014, which also tragically claimed the life of his assistant and injured three others including his son, lawyer Ramkarpal Singh.

In October 1987, Karpal Singh, along with other opposition politicians, was detained without trial under the now abolished Internal Security Act for allegedly inciting “racial tension” in the country. He was briefly released in March 1988 in response to a *habeas corpus* application, but was rearrested and remained in prison until January 1989. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience.

The Internal Security Act, which has been replaced by the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, was used in numerous cases to suppress political dissent in Malaysia.

In 2001, when the veteran lawyer stood trial after being charged under the Sedition Act for comments he made in court while acting as the lead defence counsel in the sodomy trial of Anwar Ibrahim, Amnesty International campaigned on his behalf.

Karpal Singh was again convicted of sedition in February 2014 for allegedly uttering seditious words against the Sultan of Perak at the height of a constitutional crisis in 2009.

The Sedition Act continues to be used to stifle freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Malaysia, despite pronouncements from the government in 2012 that it would repeal it.

Amnesty International remembers Karpal Singh’s commitment to justice and human rights in Malaysia. His legacy as a human rights defender will continue to live on in the work of other activists and lawyers whom he mentored and inspired.