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SINGAPORE: DROP CHARGES AGAINST RIGHTS ACTIVIST AHEAD OF UN REVIEW

The Singaporean government must immediately drop charges against human rights defender Kokila Annamalai for refusing to comply with an order under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), Amnesty International, CIVICUS and Human Rights Watch said today, as Singapore's human rights record comes under scrutiny at its upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

With Singapore's human rights record set to be examined by United Nations member states at its UPR on 12 May 2026 the government's use of repressive laws against activists is under renewed attention. Annamalai is due to face a pre-trial conference on 14 May for a [charge](#) of failing to comply with a correction direction issued by Singapore's POFMA Office in October 2024. The order followed a social media post in which she criticised the government's execution of Singaporean Azwan bin Bohari for drug related offences.

POFMA allows government ministers to issue individuals "correction directions" to publish a notice alongside social media posts it claims contain falsehoods, directing readers to a government "clarification" that presents the government's version. If found guilty, Annamalai faces a fine of up to S\$20,000 SGD (US\$15,600) and a prison term of up to 12 months, or both.

The case comes amid a broader pattern of restrictions that will likely be raised by other member states during the UPR. Since its introduction in 2019, POFMA has overwhelmingly been used to target human rights defenders and government critics, including anti-death penalty campaigners. The law grants authorities sweeping powers to criminalise online expression and lacks a public interest defence. Overly broad restrictions on sharing information, including those based on concepts such as "false news" or "misinformation" are incompatible with international human rights law and risk being used to silence critics, activists and human rights defenders.

The charge against Annamalai is part of a wider escalation in the harassment and criminalisation of activists.

On 30 April, the High Court [reversed the acquittal](#) of Annamalai, Mossammad Sobikun Nahar and Siti Amirah Mohamed Asori in relation to a February 2024 procession they led to the Presidential Palace, to deliver letters urging the President to cut ties with Israel amid the Gaza conflict. Each activist was fined S\$3000 (US\$2300) under the Public Order Act for organizing a procession in a public area without a police permit.

On 6 April, activist Jolovan Wham [faced trial](#) on three Public Order Act charges for allegedly participating in unpermitted candlelight vigils commemorating death row prisoners. A final hearing is scheduled for 13 May.

In March, government critic Jay Ish'haq Rajoo became the first person to be [charged](#) under POFMA, alongside charges of defamation and for promoting "feelings of ill will between different racial groups" under the Penal Code.

On 12 May, the UN Human Rights Council, which reviews the human rights record of every UN member state on a five year basis, will examine how well Singapore is meeting its human rights obligations.

During its last UPR in 2021, Singapore supported recommendations to align its laws on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association with international human rights standards. However, authorities have continued to prosecute activists solely for exercising their fundamental rights using laws such as POFMA, the Public Order Act and defamation provisions.

As UN member states assess Singapore's human rights compliance the Singapore government should immediately drop all charges against activists, government critics and others for exercising their rights. UN member states should

make [strong recommendations](#) to the government to uphold the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including by ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.