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Singapore sentences UK author to jail

Singapore dealt a sharp blow to freedom of expression by sentencing 76-year-old British author Alan Shadrake to jail for publishing a book which criticises the Singaporean judiciary, Amnesty International said today.

Shadrake was sentenced to six weeks in jail and a fine of 50,000 Singapore dollars US\$15,400. He was convicted of contempt of court for ‘scandalizing the judiciary’ over allegations of judicial misconduct in his book on Singapore’s death penalty.

“Singapore is answering criticism by jailing its critics,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director. “Alan Shadrake’s sentence is a major step backwards for freedom of expression in Singapore.”

Shadrake was arrested in Singapore in July 2010 after launching his book, “Once a Jolly Hangman: Singapore Justice in the Dock.”

He is being prosecuted under Singapore’s criminal defamation laws, which have been used to target other critics of the government. The UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression has called on countries to abolish criminal defamation laws, on the grounds that civil defamation laws provide adequate protection.

“By penalizing Alan Shadrake, Singapore has drawn even greater global attention to its lack of respect for freedom of expression,” said Zarifi.