

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Singapore: International Bar Association urged to take action on restrictions on freedom of expression**

Amnesty International calls on the some 3,000 lawyers from many countries, who are currently attending the 14 - 19 October International Bar Association (IBA) meeting in Singapore, to condemn the misuse of the law to silence government critics and human rights campaigners.

Amnesty International urges IBA participants to express their concern about the continuing use of restrictive laws and civil defamation suits by People's Action Party leaders to silence peaceful critics of the government. Laws allowing restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly - in violation of international standards, and combined with a pattern of politically motivated defamation suits - have served to maintain a climate of political intimidation and self-censorship in Singapore.

The leader of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party, prominent government critic and human rights defender Dr. Chee Soon Juan, has been imprisoned for saying that the judiciary in Singapore lacked independence and for speaking without a public permit. He was bankrupted in a suit led by two government leaders and is consequently barred from seeking re-election. Recently, he and his colleagues were arrested for "illegal assembly" when they held peaceful vigils protesting the use of violence against peaceful protestors in Myanmar and raised questions about Singapore's links with Myanmar. The authorities had refused to provide a permit for the vigil. Dr. Chee, who is internationally recognised for his campaigning for human rights and democracy, plans to hold a one-person vigil to raise awareness of relationships between Singapore and Myanmar including arms trading, for the duration of the IBA meeting.

In further examples, two prominent lawyers have been penalised for exercising their right to express their opinions. Francis T. Seow, former solicitor general and former president of the Law Society, was detained as a prisoner of conscience. He was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) after representing ISA detainees and for allegedly interfering in Singapore's internal affairs, and was released only after making a "confession", which he later retracted in exile on the grounds that it was made under duress. Former judge and former leader of the opposition Workers' Party J. B. Jeyaretnam was prohibited from running in any elections and practising law following bankruptcy in a series of politically motivated defamation suits brought by prominent ruling party politicians. He is only this year able to reply his creditors and is now again eligible to practice law and seek a parliamentary seat.

The IBA meeting in Singapore provides a crucial opportunity for the Association to demonstrate its opposition to the politically motivated use of the law to stifle dissent. Amnesty International urges the IBA meeting to take immediate action to condemn such misuse of the law.