

My name is Terry Xu. I am the Editor of The Online Citizen, and I speak as a journalist and human rights defender. I am currently based in Taiwan in self-exile, after The Online Citizen's operating licence was revoked, and because it is not realistically or legally possible for me to continue my work from within Singapore.

I will address the themes allocated to this panel: human rights violations against journalists and activists and civic space; the death penalty; migrant workers' rights; and briefly, treatment of detainees and police misconduct. As I am currently the only confirmed speaker, I will do so at a high level, and provide further detail in the accompanying factsheet.

During the last UPR cycle, many States urged Singapore to review, amend, or repeal the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, or POFMA. In practice, POFMA concentrates power in the Executive: ministers determine what constitutes a "falsehood", and the affected person or outlet must comply first and bear the burden of challenging the decision.

Even where an outlet complies, the Government can escalate to the Declared Online Location regime, which can make continued operation effectively impossible by restricting the ability to monetise the declared online location.

This goes beyond the Government's framing of POFMA as merely non-adversarial "corrections". In judicial review, courts have deferred to the Executive's position, and the cost exposure of litigation can be prohibitive in practice. Recipients may also be called in for interviews by POFMA authorities, reinforcing the chilling effect.

Separately, several individuals, including myself, have faced civil defamation proceedings brought by Cabinet ministers, resulting in six-figure damages. As public interest is not a defence under Singapore's defamation law, this signals that criticism of powerful public figures can carry existential financial risk.

Singapore should review and amend POFMA within 12 months, including independent oversight, effective appeal safeguards, and cost protections, so freedom of expression is not subject to executive determination with prohibitive barriers to challenge.

Civic space cannot function when public-interest information is structurally inaccessible. Despite repeated recommendations, Singapore still has no Freedom of Information law.

In September 2024, I sent two email requests to the Singapore Land Authority seeking information on state land and property management issues of significant public interest. I received automated

acknowledgements but no substantive response thereafter. When reporting proceeded amid this information gap, the response was not transparency, but enforcement and correction powers under POFMA.

Even in Parliament, figures may be withheld or released in fragmented form, limiting meaningful public scrutiny. FOI is the missing accountability. Infrastructure.

Singapore should enact a Freedom of Information law within 18 months, with a default two-week response timeline, narrow and defined exemptions, an independent appeal mechanism, and fee waivers or cost caps for public-interest and journalistic requests.

The UPR has repeatedly called for Singapore to move toward a moratorium and to strengthen safeguards in capital cases.

Between 30 March 2022 and 27 November 2025, 42 hangings were carried out—the majority for drug offences. This raises serious proportionality concerns, especially where mandatory sentencing constrains judicial discretion, and where presumption clauses in drug laws shift burdens in ways that undermine fair-trial standards.

Concerns have also been raised that death row inmates increasingly have to represent themselves in post-conviction proceedings, amid legal changes that may deter lawyers from taking on cases perceived as “futile”.

Singapore should establish an immediate moratorium on executions, publish comprehensive and disaggregated data, and abolish mandatory death sentencing in law within 24 months, with a view to full abolition.

Specialist civil society organisations estimate that low-wage and mid-tier migrant workers number about 1.34 million. They report that reforms since the last cycle have not addressed structural drivers of exploitation: power imbalance, limits on job mobility, deceptive recruitment, and barriers to remedies.

They also document that recruitment fee caps are widely circumvented through foreign agent arrangements and informal intermediaries, creating debt pressures that increase vulnerability. The case of Uddin MD Sharif illustrates retaliation and remedy barriers, where a worker seeking remedies faced a departure deadline after his work permit was revoked.

Singapore should strengthen migrant workers' rights within 18 months by guaranteeing non-

retaliation, expanding legal aid and translation support, improving safe pathways for job mobility, and publishing annual data on complaints, resolution times, inspections, and enforcement outcomes.

Finally, Singapore should strengthen early access to legal counsel and independent oversight of detention practices, and establish an independent police complaints mechanism with transparent reporting of outcomes.

Excellencies, these concerns go directly to whether civic space exists in practice; whether capital punishment meets minimum fair-trial standards; and whether migrant workers can access justice without fear. I urge States to raise these issues and press for measurable commitments in the next cycle.

Thank you.