

Human Rights Watch Statement

UPR outcome report on Singapore

September 2011

Singapore's UPR report focuses on its commitments to improving the social and economic well-being of the population through the delivery of enhanced health services, educational opportunities, and housing upgrades.

We regret, however, Singapore's unwillingness to consider important recommendations dealing with political and civil rights including steps toward repeal of all laws permitting arbitrary detention without charge or trial, and abolition of the death penalty.

Singapore refuses to consider repeal of its Internal Security Act and other laws that permit detention without charge when the executive branch claims national security or public order is threatened. Detainees may challenge their detention only on procedural grounds. Conditions of release may include restriction orders that severely limit a person's right to basic activities such as moving a residence or changing a job. Principles of legality and the rule of law protect the right of all detainees to take proceedings before a court to enable the court to decide without delay on the lawfulness of detention. Singapore's Internal Security Act has long been used to detain persons for exercising their fundamental freedoms under international law and to deny detainees internationally recognized due process rights. Singapore's preventive detention laws should be immediately rescinded.

Singapore should reject the use of the death penalty, which includes the imposition of non-discretionary death sentences for alleged drug traffickers. Human Rights Watch urges Singapore to join the growing community of nations who have endorsed General Assembly resolution 62/149 on Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty.

Singapore should revise laws and state practice to ensure the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly in line with international standards. Although Singapore maintains that states' recommendations on these rights "are based on incorrect assumptions or premises," Human Rights Watch has found that, despite a loosening of some restrictions, the government maintains significant curbs on expression, and uses its powers to limit free association and assembly as it sees fit.

The most recent high-profile case implicating the right to free speech involved the government's prosecution of British journalist Alan Shadrake for his book *Once a Jolly Hangman: Singapore Justice in the Dock*, which alleges that the justice system permits political and economic pressures and the ruling People's Action Party interference to affect court decisions related to capital punishment. At his trial, the prosecution cited 11 specific

statements in the book, including the title, to argue that Shadrake's allegations and insinuations "muzzle confidence in the courts' impartiality, integrity and independence." Shadrake was found guilty of contempt of court for "scandalizing the jury," fined and sentenced to a six-week prison term.

Singapore's announcement that it plans to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is a positive development. However, Singapore should join with the vast majority of UN member states and ratify all core UN human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Such ratifications would also appropriately commit Singapore to end the use of torture such as judicially authorized caning and caning in educational facilities.

Singapore has made some efforts to promote the well-being of migrant laborers. However, Singapore was one of only nine states that did not vote for passage of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Singapore should ratify both ILO Convention No. 189 and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.