



Singapore

3 November 2010

Singapore: Conviction of British author is yet another assault on freedom of expression

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) condemns the conviction of British journalist Mr. Alan Shadrake by the Singapore High Court today, which found him guilty of 'scandalising' the Singapore courts in 11 passages in his latest book *Once A Jolly Hangman: Singapore Justice in the Dock*. Mr. Shadrake, 75, will be sentenced on 9 November 2010 and faces a custodial sentence, a fine, or both. At the same time, he is also being investigated for criminal defamation and faces a sentence of two years in prison and fines if convicted.

Mr. Shadrake was arrested on 18 July, 2000 in Singapore, one day after he launched his book. In writing *Once a Jolly Hangman*, the author combed through court case files from over the years and interviewed human rights activists, lawyers, former police officers and a former chief executioner at the Changi prison. The conclusions drawn from these sources are critical of the way death penalty is administered by the Singaporean judiciary. The book further suggests that there have been instances where the courts appeared to have bowed to foreign pressure, favoured the rich and privileged, and were used as a weapon to silence the opposition and other dissidents. Both the Government and members of the ruling party have successfully sued and obtained convictions of opposition politicians and a number of foreign media organisations for publishing articles or commentaries critical of the ruling regime.

In an open letter to the Acting Attorney-General of Singapore on 23 July 2010, FIDH expressed its deep concern that the judicial action against Mr. Shadrake "creates a climate of fear and restricts the openness of the public discussion on sensitive issues, such as the death penalty". [1] In recent official submissions to the UN Universal Periodic Review of Singapore, scheduled for May 2011, civil society organisations in Singapore have all highlighted the severe restrictions of freedom of expression and the press, both in law and in practice.

FIDH considers Singapore's handling of the case of Mr. Shadrake a measure of its willingness to uphold the human rights principles in the ASEAN Charter, the guarantee of freedom of expression in its own Constitution, as well as the rights guaranteed by the United Nations Universal Declaration for Human Rights.

"Singapore's progress as an economic powerhouse stands in stark contrast to its government's authoritarian tendency and the draconian measures it uses to muzzle the freedom of expression", said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President. "This case illustrates the on-going need for the Singaporean government to undertake the necessary reforms to truly protect fundamental freedoms and rights, including through decriminalizing defamation and ceasing its resort to legal actions as a knee-jerk response to criticisms of its courts".

[1] See "Judicial harassment of journalist an affront to freedom of expression", FIDH, 23 July 2010. Available at <http://www.fidh.org/Open-letter-to-...>

<http://www.fidh.org/Singapore-Conviction-of-British-author-is-yet>