

Statement at 32nd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 6: UPR Outcomes – Singapore

Thank you Mr. President,

The International Service for Human Rights is pleased to be joined in this room by a range of national level organisations and human rights defenders from Singapore.

We are encouraged by their participation, and welcome the voices of defenders on the ground as a testament – as the delegation of Singapore has noted in its response¹ – to the value of the UPR process in building opportunities for dialogue between government and civil society as to how to fully realize all human rights for all those living in Singapore.

In this regard, we would urge the government of Singapore to ensure that the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights is truly independent, accountable to and inclusive of civil society.²

We remain concerned about the challenges that face individuals and organisations who seek to publicly discuss dissenting views. First, laws and regulations that prevent anonymous private donations, or that prevent some organisations – including those working on human rights - from accessing foreign funding, should be reviewed to ensure they do not create barriers to full participation and are compatible with international law.

Second, access to information is a critical tool for civil society. The lack of a legal framework in the country to permit regular, credible information to be accessed by civil society groups working in relation to a range of issues – from social and economic rights to due process and capital punishment – also constitutes a practical barrier to their work.

We are also concerned about the harassment of defenders, including those cooperating with the UN. Teo Soh Lung, a longtime activist in the country, and a well-known blogger are currently facing court charges filed by the Elections Department. Merely for expressing political opinions online, in recent weeks their offices and homes have been searched and their personal and professional electronic devices confiscated. We echo the views of local actors: this behavior is an example of official efforts to ‘encroach upon the work of civil society’.

In light of accepted recommendations from France³ and New Zealand⁴, we would urge Singapore, and other interested States, to pay particular attention to implementation of recommendations linked to freedom of expression, online and off.

We call on the Government of Singapore to remove all barriers and threats to defenders seeking to do their part to ensure that the ‘fair and inclusive’ society Singapore claims to be is in fact ‘fair and inclusive’, as well as just and rights-respecting.

¹ A/HRC/32/17/Add.1

² 166.99, 166.124.

³ 166.201

⁴ 166.202