

## Singapore: Solidarity with M. Ravi

### *Joint Statement*

We stand in solidarity with **M. Ravi**, a capital defence lawyer and human rights defender in Singapore with over twenty years of experience. On 21 March 2023, the Court of Three Judges imposed a five year suspension under s83(1)(b) of the [Legal Profession Act 1986](#). M. Ravi was also ordered to pay the costs of the Law Society's application. This is in the context of M. Ravi facing a number of disciplinary hearings and [police investigations](#), having been personally fined over \$70,000 Singapore dollars stemming from death penalty cases he has undertaken, most of which were run on a pro-bono basis.

Suspending a capital defence lawyer in relation to their public comments, for the maximum possible length of time, from being unable to partake in their livelihood, sends a chilling message to capital defence lawyers in Singapore. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Judges and Lawyers Margaret Satterthwaite has stated in reference to M. Ravi's suspension, "[Lawyers, like everyone, are entitled to freedom of expression](#)." It has already been [publicly noted](#) that these lawyers have allegedly been afraid of taking on cases deemed to be 'late-stage' appeals for fear of cost sanctions. Since April 2022, there have been [a number of cases](#) where a person facing imminent execution has spent their final days appearing unrepresented, pleading for their lives. In August 2022, [24 persons on death row](#) filed an unsuccessful joint Constitutional challenge on the point of lack of access to Counsel - all appeared unrepresented.

We challenge the Courts' contention that M. Ravi poses a "[continuing danger](#)" to the public confidence in the Singaporean judicial system. Rather, M. Ravi has demonstrated the key role that capital defence lawyers play in ensuring necessary access to justice at every stage of the criminal justice system for those facing irreversible punishment. This is important given the delayed access to counsel at the start of a police investigation due to structural hurdles that exist in Singapore, along with the recent imposition of laws that cause severe limitations on [Post-Appeal Applications in capital cases](#). These developments threaten the right to a fair trial, with consequences of this issue leading straight to the question of the right to life. We cite the following examples to illustrate this point:

1. [Yong Vui Kong](#), whose life was spared in 2012 following the amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act. This would not have been possible had M Ravi not filed a successful criminal motion *after* Yong's appeal had been dismissed.
2. In the case which is the subject matter of this suspension, M. Ravi successfully argued in a court motion *after* an unsuccessful appeal that [Gobi a/l Avedian's](#) sentence to death be set aside.
3. M. Ravi filed an urgent Application to Re-Open an Appeal for [Syed Suhail just days before his scheduled execution](#) resulting in the discovery that 13 prisoners - including 12 persons on death row - had collectively had [68 personal letters - including some letters to lawyers - leaked to the Attorney-Generals' office](#) by the Singapore Prison Service.

Without M. Ravi, Yong Vui Kong, Gobi a/l Avedian, Syed Suhail and a number of others would have been executed.

The [Court judgement](#) (p132) refers to M. Ravi's reliance on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) - which Singapore is a signatory to - as being 'misconceived':

*"First, there was no evidence to suggest that his condition had contributed to his misconduct in this case. In fact, at the material time, Mr Ravi was practising under a conditional practising certificate which mandated, amongst other conditions, that Mr Ravi had to attend regular medical appointments to monitor his fitness to practise. Accordingly, there was no suggestion that Mr Ravi was labouring under his previous medical condition when he made the impugned remarks in October 2020, nor even at the point when he took on the Gobi proceedings in September 2019."*

The idea that a recognised chronic mental health condition can be 'switched off' and not have any relevance - particularly in the context of running a capital defence case - flies in the face of what we know of the experience of persons living with disabilities. We urge the Court to engage more meaningfully with the principles underlying the CRPD, which refers to disability as "[an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others](#)".

Striking off one of the few lawyers prepared to accept these cases is particularly concerning given the [climate of harassment and intimidation](#) already faced by those who oppose the death penalty; including detainment, questioning, threats and penalties. To bring into disrepute the concept of fearless advocacy which is the bedrock of legal representation in a robust judicial system, could be disastrous for the rule of law that underpins the Singapore legal system.

We call on the Singapore authorities to halt its current spate of executions in line with the global trend towards abolition and to end the harassment of lawyers who dedicate their lives to defend those without a voice.

Signed:

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