

Singapore: Respect and protect the right to freedom of expression

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The briefing paper highlights concerns over risks facing HRDs and official restrictions on the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, especially for those advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) rights.

'Male same-sex relations continue to be a crime under the Penal Code and the government has introduced a requirement that material advocating LGBTI rights must be taken down within 24-hours following a directive by the police. The government must amend these laws to protect LGBTI defenders,' said ISHR's Pooja Patel.

More broadly, the Government continues to criminalise the legitimate work of HRDs and journalists – including through charges of defamation, 'contempt of court', and media censorship laws such as the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act and the Broadcasting Act.

In its last UPR review, Singapore accepted a recommendation on repealing or narrowing the restrictions on public discourse. However, this has not yet been implemented. Journalists and media workers still face legal actions and restrictions that are incompatible with the right to freedom of expression under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the ICCPR.

ISHR urges States to make strong UPR recommendations regarding the protection of HRDs and safeguarding civil society space in Singapore, including to:

- Review defamation laws and ensure that their application is not used to arbitrarily stifle freedom of opinion and expression, and that the de facto ban on public demonstrations is lifted.
- Ensure the full promotion and protection of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association in line with international human rights standards.
- Repeal the 24-hour takedown requirement for 'material that advocates homosexuality or lesbianism' on popular websites.
- Repeal or substantially reform the legal offence of contempt of court. It has repeatedly been used to charge foreign, as well as domestic, citizens.

Contact: Sarah Brooks, International Service for Human Rights, on s.brooks@ishr.ch