

14 September 2017

Singapore: Human rights defenders under investigation for holding candlelight vigil

On 13 September 2017, **Kirsten Han** was interrogated by the Bedok Division police in relation with the ongoing investigation into her and into fellow human rights defenders **Terry Xu, Jolovan Wham** and **Jason Soo**. All of the human rights defenders were questioned over the past week. On 6 September 2017, Terry Xu was prevented from travelling by immigration officers at a checkpoint between Singapore and Malaysia and told that he would not be permitted to leave the country as he was under investigation. On 3 September 2017, the four human rights defenders, along with several members of civil society, were informed by the police that they were being investigated for violating the Public Order Act after they participated in an anti death penalty vigil.

[Terry Xu](#) is a human rights defender and the Chief Editor of **The Online Citizen**, an independent news website in Singapore. A staunch defender of freedom of expression and information, his writing advocates for transparency of the government and against corruption within Singaporean society. [Kirsten Han](#) is a human rights defender, a freelance journalist and a founding member of the anti death penalty organisation **We Believe in Second Chances**. She has also written on labour rights, freedom of expression and transparency in national politics, among others. [Jolovan Wham](#) is a human rights defender and a long-time advocate for migrant workers' rights and against modern slavery in Singapore. He has also spoken out to defend LGBTI rights and has worked with other members of civil society to highlight issues related to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. [Jason Soo](#) is a human rights defender and an independent filmmaker who also documents civil society events related to human rights. His most recent film *1987: Untracing the Conspiracy* which is based on the interrogation and torture of 22 people accused of being Marxist conspirators by the Internal Security Department of Singapore, was awarded Best Southeast Asian Feature at Freedom Film Festival (2015).

On 13 September 2017, investigation officers from Bedok division police in Singapore questioned Kirsten Han on her involvement in a candlelight vigil in July 2017. Over the past week, Terry Xu, Jolovan Wham and Jason Soo also responded to a police summons, during which they were all questioned about the organisers of the vigil and its purpose. They were also informed that restrictions on their travel had been lifted.

On 3 September 2017, the Singapore Police Force notified human rights defenders Terry Xu, Kirsten Han, Jolovan Wham and Jason Soo that they were under investigation for 'taking part in a public assembly without a permit' and summoned them for questioning. Although the official letter made no mention of travel restrictions, Terry Xu was prevented from entering Malaysia upon his arrival at Woodlands Checkpoint on 6 September 2017.

The four defenders, along with several other activists, are being investigated under Section 16(2)(a) of the Public Order Act following a vigil held in solidarity with the family of Prabakaran Srivijayan, a Malaysian national who was sentenced to the death penalty and executed on 14 July 2017. On the eve of his execution, a group of anti death penalty activists as well as friends and family of Prabakaran gathered to participate in a candlelight vigil outside Changi prison. Fifteen minutes into

the vigil, the police arrived and confiscated the candles as well as photographs of Prabakaran Srivijayan. The human rights defenders complied with police orders and were told that the vigil could continue as long as candles were not lit.

The right to assembly in Singapore is heavily limited and closely monitored. The Public Order Act, promulgated in 2009, regulates public talks, assemblies and protests, placing serious restrictions on civil society space. In April 2017, amendments to the Act granted police additional powers to limit or ban peaceful gatherings, increasing the risk of criminalisation for exercising the legitimate right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of human rights defenders Terry Xu, Kirsten Han, Jolovan Wham and Jason Soo, which it believes is solely motivated by their human rights activities in Singapore as well as the peaceful and legitimate exercise of their freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Singapore to:

1. Immediately close the investigation against Terry Xu, Kirsten Han, Jolovan Wham and Jason Soo and refrain from further judicial harassment as it is believed that is solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Singapore are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.