



Joint Statement: Condemning The Arrest of Peaceful Protestors Against LGBT Discrimination in Singapore

(29 January 2021, Bangkok/Kuala Lumpur/Manila) — We, the undersigned, are alarmed by the arrest of the three individuals who were exercising their right to assembly in a peaceful protest against transphobia outside the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore earlier this week on 26th January. We call on the authorities to unconditionally end any judicial harassment against the protestors, for the Government of Singapore to respect and protect the right to peaceful assembly for all, and for the MOE to swiftly act on the discrimination against transgender and LGBT students in schools and universities.

The protest stemmed from a student's post going viral on social media after she wrote about being unable to begin hormone replacement therapy due to intervention from the MOE, whose interference resulted in her inability to receive a doctor's referral letter.

The Right to Protest

Article 14 of the Constitution of Singapore, specifically Article 14(1), guarantees and protects Singaporeans the rights to freedom of speech and expression, peaceful assembly without arms, and association. Students have a right to dissent and protest policies which are unfair and discriminatory and in this case - the alleged interference by the MOE resulting in the denial of the right to transition, access to education, as well as a denial of the right to healthcare and medical treatment of one's choice.

MOE Must Safeguard Transgender Students

Transgender students in Singapore are not receiving the support and care they need in schools, which in turn leads to heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and mental health issues. TransgenderSG, the Asia Pacific Transgender Network and Sayoni, a Singapore-based feminist, volunteer-run organisation released a UPR report in 2020 noting the high amount of discrimination and restrictions that transgender students face in Singapore. While, 77.6% of openly transgender students reported negative experiences in school ranging from bullying to sexual abuse, less than a third agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe at school. Only 24% said they had a staff member they could go to for support. Furthermore, the report also found that school administrators not only pressured transgender students to drop out of school, but also prevented them from transitioning or obtaining hormone replacement therapy, sometimes by going as far as contacting their healthcare providers without the student's or their parents' knowledge or consent.

The MOE must ensure that educational institutions are equipped to provide an affirming and supportive environment for all gender-diverse students that not only affirms their existence but

also affords a safe space for dialogue. We call on the MOE to ensure that policies are implemented across schools to safeguard the physical and mental wellbeing of transgender students. This includes re-examining comprehensive sexuality education within school programming, and prioritising the inclusion of quality and nonjudgmental comprehensive sexuality education that takes into account the needs of gender-diverse young people. These comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression need to be put firmly into place, and need to be a familiar part of the education system at all levels.

The Government of Singapore must uphold and protect the right to dissent and the right to peaceful assembly that belongs to all people as a building block for a healthy democracy. The Government must create effective redressal mechanisms that are accessible to students facing violence and discrimination in schools as a primary obligation in making educational institutions safe and inclusive for all.

We reiterate our call for the authorities to unconditionally end any judicial harassment against the protestors and for the MOE to swiftly act on the discrimination against transgender and LGBT students in schools and universities. As a member of the United Nations, Singapore has a duty to uphold Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This includes transgender people. Trans rights are human rights.

Signed by:

The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) is a network of human rights activists from Southeast Asia. The ASC works for the inclusion of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) in the mandate of human rights duty bearers in the ASEAN region. The ASC works for the promotion and protection of the human rights of all persons regardless of SOGIESC in the Southeast Asian region. <https://aseansogiecaucus.org/>

The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)

ARROW is a regional non-profit women's organization based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. They have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) of the United Nations. They work closely with many national partners in countries, regional and global networks around the world, and are able to reach stakeholders in 120 countries to enable women to be equal citizens in all aspects of their life by ensuring their sexual and reproductive health and rights are achieved. <http://arrow.org.my/>

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a regional network of 81

member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu.

www.forum-asia.org

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