

30 November 2017

## **Singapore: Human rights defender Jolovan Wham charged on seven counts**

On 29 November 2017, **Jolovan Wham** was charged with seven offences by the Attorney-General's Chambers in Singapore in an open hearing. The charges include three counts of organising a public assembly without a police permit and one count of vandalism.

[Jolovan Wham](#) is a human rights defender and 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.

On 28 November 2017, Jolovan Wham was summoned to the Central Police Station where he was detained by Singapore Police Force but later released on \$8,000 bail. On the same day, the Singapore Police Force released a [statement](#) declaring their intention to charge the human rights defender on 29 November 2017 under the Public Order Act for organising public assemblies without a police permit, the Vandalism Act for one count of vandalism, and the Penal Code for refusing to sign his statements. The statement branded him as refractory and having a disregard for the law in organising or participating in illegal public gatherings. The pre-trial hearing for his case will begin on 13 December 2017.

On 13 July 2017, Jolovan Wham, along with a number of [other human rights defenders](#), held a candlelit vigil outside Changi Prison Complex in solidarity with the family of Prabakaran Srivijayan, a Malaysian national who was sentenced to death and executed on 14 July 2017. On the eve of his execution, a group of activists protesting the use of the death penalty in Singapore, as well as friends and family of Prabakaran Srivijayan, gathered outside Changi prison. Fifteen minutes into the vigil, the police arrived and confiscated their 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. Jolovan Wham is however being charged for organising the public gathering without a police permit. The investigation into the other human rights defenders involved is still ongoing.

On 3 June 2017, Jolovan Wham organised a silent protest to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Operation Spectrum – a security operation that resulted in the arrest of 22 activists in 1987. Nine people participated in the protest, which took place on board a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) train, wherein each person stood blindfolded and silent holding up a copy of the book "1987: Singapore's Marxist Conspiracy 30 Years On", and then proceeded to sit and read the book together. Jolovan Wham is facing a charge for organising this event without a police permit and another charge under the Vandalism Act for pasting two A4-sheets on the MRT train.

On 26 November 2016, Jolovan Wham, along with human rights defenders [Kirsten Han](#) and Seelan Palay, organised an indoor gathering to discuss civil disobedience and democracy movements. Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong was a remote speaker at the event. A police permit was required as Joshua Wong is not a Singaporean citizen. Due to this gathering, various equipment was confiscated from the organisers and an investigation was instigated. Jolovan Wham is facing another charge for organising this event without a police permit.

The right to assembly in Singapore is heavily limited and closely monitored. The 2009 Public Order Act 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 defender Jolovan Wham, which it believes is solely motivated by his human rights activities in Singapore as well as the peaceful and legitimate exercise of his freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Singapore to:**

1. Immediately close the investigation and drop all charges against Jolovan Wham as it is believed that this is solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Review its existing legislation with a view to lifting undue restrictions on freedom of assembly;
3. 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.