



Republic of Singapore
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**Submission by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation,
NGO in General Consultative Status with ECOSOC**

And

**The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS has members in over 180 countries throughout the world.
- 1.2 The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 90 organisations in 23 countries that works to promote and protect human rights, including the right to development, through collaboration and cooperation among human rights organisations and defenders in Asia and beyond.
- 1.3 In this submission, the two organisations examine the Government of Singapore's compliance with its international human rights obligations to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for civil society. Specifically, we analyse Singapore's fulfilment of the rights to freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and unwarranted restrictions on human rights defenders (HRDs) since its previous UPR examination in 2021. We assess Singapore's implementation of recommendations relating to these issues received during the 3rd UPR cycle and provide follow-up recommendations.
- 1.4 During the 3rd UPR cycle, the Government of Singapore received 19 recommendations relating to the space for civil society (civic space). It accepted five recommendations and noted 14. However, an evaluation of a range of legal sources and human rights documentation addressed in this submission demonstrates that it has only partly implemented one recommendation.
- 1.5 The government has persistently failed to address unwarranted civic space restrictions since its last UPR examination. Acute implementation gaps were found with regard to the rights to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly.
- 1.6 Singapore has yet to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which imposes obligations on states to respect and protect freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly. Further, the government has ignored numerous recommendations to establish a national human rights institution.¹
- 1.7 We are deeply concerned by the use of restrictive laws such as the 2019 Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) to target and silence activists, critics, journalists and opposition politicians for their online expression. A

¹ Recommendations 59.49 and 59.50. 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Singapore', UN Human Rights Council, 22 July 2021, <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/48/16>.

sweeping piece of legislation on misinformation, POFMA has been used to target and harass government critics for their online expression.

1.8 We are further alarmed by restrictions in law under the 2009 Public Order Act (POA) that the authorities use to harass and criminalise peaceful protesters.

1.9 As a result of these issues, civic space in Singapore is currently classified as 'repressed' by the CIVICUS Monitor, indicating a severe level of civic space restrictions.²

- Section 2 of this submission examines Singapore's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards concerning freedom of association.
- Section 3 examines Singapore's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards related to the protection of civil society activists, HRDs and journalists.
- Section 4 examines Singapore's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards concerning freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information.
- Section 5 examines Singapore's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards related to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Section 6 contains recommendations to address the concerns raised and advance implementation of recommendations under the 3rd cycle.
- Section 7 is an annex on the implementation of 3rd cycle UPR recommendations related to civic space.

2. Freedom of association

2.1 During Singapore's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received one recommendation directly related to the right to freedom of association. The government supported the recommendation to 'remove all existing obstacles to the registration of LGBTI organisations'. However, as evidenced below, the government has failed to take adequate measures to realise the recommendation fully.

2.2 Article 14 of the Singaporean Constitution states that 'all citizens of Singapore have the right to form associations'.³ However, despite these commitments, legal barriers persist to the effective realisation of this right for CSOs.

² CIVICUS Monitor: Singapore, <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/singapore>.

³ 'Constitution of The Republic of Singapore', <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/sg/sg047en.pdf>.

- 2.3** Under the 1966 Societies Act the authorities have extensive discretionary powers to limit the right to freedom of association. Principally, the Societies Act requires all CSOs with over 10 members to register with the government. According to article 4, the Registrar of Societies can deny an application on a number of broad and subjective grounds, including when a CSO's mandate is 'contrary to the national interest for the specified society to be registered', 'is identical to that of any other existing society' or 'is in the opinion of the Registrar undesirable'.⁴
- 2.4** The Societies Act further includes several vague provisions that can be invoked to dissolve a CSO or sanction its members and employees. According to article 24, the Registrar of Societies can deregister a CSO that engages in activities considered 'prejudicial to public peace, welfare or good order in Singapore'. Moreover, people who are employed by or support an 'unlawful society' face severe criminal penalties. Article 15 of the law states that 'any person who knowingly allows a meeting of an unlawful society, or of members of an unlawful society to be held in any house' may be fined up to S\$5,000 (approx. US\$3,878) or imprisoned for up to three years, or both. People who are members of an unlawful society or attend a meeting of an unlawful society can be subjected to the same penalties.
- 2.5** There is a lack of information about whether barriers for LGBTQI+ organisations to register under the Societies Act have been lifted, as recommended in the previous cycle. On a positive note, in 2022 parliament repealed Penal Code article 377A, which criminalised sex between men.⁵
- 2.6** The government has targeted civil society groups for their activism and expression. In May 2023 under the POFMA, it ordered the Transformative Justice Collective (TJC), which campaigns against the death penalty, to add a correction notice at the top of a Facebook post, stating that the post contained a false statement of fact about the execution of a convicted drug trafficker.⁶ In December 2024, the Ministry of Digital Development and Information declared TJC's website and social media accounts as a DOL under POFMA section 32 for two years.⁷

⁴ 'Societies Act 1966', Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/SA1966>.

⁵ '377A repeal: Singapore turns page on dark LGBT history', BBC, 4 December 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-63832825>; 'Singapore: belated recognition of LGBTQI+ rights', CIVICUS Lens, 29 August 2022, <https://lens.civicus.org/singapore-belated-recognition-of-lgbtqi-rights>.

⁶ 'Singapore: anti-fake news POFMA law used to block news outlet, target critics as another law to regulate online content is passed', CIVICUS Monitor, 18 August 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-anti-fake-news-pofma-law-used-to-block-news-outlet-target-critics-as-another-law-to-regulate-online-content-is-passed>.

⁷ 'Singapore: government continues its crackdown on anti-death penalty activism and other forms of expression', CIVICUS Monitor, 5 February 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-government-continues-its-crackdown-on-anti-death-penalty-activism-and-other-forms-of-expression>.

- 2.7** In 2023, civil society groups Maruah and Think Centre were under the 2021 Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA).⁸ The law, purportedly introduced to prevent, detect and disrupt foreign interference in domestic politics,⁹ allows the government to force those designated as PSPs to ‘disclose foreign affiliations’ (article 76) or ‘reportable arrangements’ (article 78) to a foreign entity. The designation can create a more challenging environment for civil society groups to seek funds from external sources and volunteers, and to attend and participate in regional and international meetings.¹⁰
- 2.8** Constitutional guarantees protecting the right of workers to organise are further undermined by stringent and discriminatory legislative restrictions on trade unions. The government continues to place onerous constraints on the right to organise and collectively bargain. Of serious concern are requirements under the 1940 Trade Unions Act that oblige all unions to officially register with the Registrar of Trade Unions, which has wide-ranging powers to refuse or withdraw a union’s registration on various arbitrary grounds, including under article 14f on the basis that a union of similar purpose already exists. In addition, under the Trade Unions Act article 28.3, government employees must seek the president’s explicit approval before joining a trade union.¹¹

3. Harassment and arrests against civil society activists, human rights defenders and journalists

- 3.1** Under Singapore’s previous UPR examination, the government received one recommendation on the protection of civil society activists, HRDs and journalists. The government was urged to ‘ensure full respect for the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association by taking measures to enhance the security of civil society, journalists and human rights defenders’. The government noted the recommendation but failed to implement it.
- 3.2** Article 12 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders mandates states to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of HRDs. However, our organisations have observed the harassment and criminalisation of HRDs, lawyers and journalists, in a number of cases related to advocacy against the death penalty.

⁸ ‘Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act 2021’, Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/FICA2021>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ‘Individuals and Organisations Designated as Politically Significant Persons under FICA’, Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, <https://www.mha.gov.sg/fica/designations>.

¹¹ ‘Trade Unions Act 1940’, Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/TUA1940>.

- 3.3** The government has also failed to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles, which could provide a mechanism for protection.
- 3.4** In February 2022, activist Jolovan Wham was fined S\$3,000 (approx. US\$2,200) for violating the POA by holding a one-person ‘unlawful assembly’ in December 2018 along the main entrance of the former State Courts building. Wham had held up a paper calling on the government to drop charges against The Online Citizen’s (TOC) editor Terry Xu and alleged contributor Daniel de Costa, who faced defamation charges.¹² Wham was charged again on 3 February 2025 for taking part in five candlelight vigils for prison inmates on death row. The vigils were held between March 2022 and April 2023 for people convicted of drug trafficking.¹³
- 3.5** Police questioned Activists Kirsten Han and Rocky Howe in June 2022 at Bedok Police Division Headquarters over potential violations of the POA after they participated in two public assemblies in March and April 2022.¹⁴ UN Special Procedures mandate holders raised concerns about their case in a communication in November 2022.¹⁵ In October 2022, the police issued Han with a 12-month-conditional warning under section 3(1)(a) of the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act 2016 (AOJPA) to remain crime-free in response to a Facebook post on the death penalty she published on 10 May 2022.¹⁶ If not, she faced a risk of prosecution for any new offence on top of the original one of contempt of court. Under the guise of protecting the judicial system, the authorities have used the AOJPA, a vaguely worded contempt-of-court law, to prosecute HRDs for criticism of the courts.
- 3.6** In March 2025, Han received a message from the authorities regarding a new investigation into the potential offence of participating in a public assembly at a protected area under POA section 15(2)(a). The investigation is believed to be

¹² ‘Singapore continues to restrict fundamental freedoms, despite downgrade in civic space rating’, CIVICUS Monitor, 12 April 2022, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-continues-restrict-fundamental-freedoms-despite-downgrade-civic-space-rating>.

¹³ CIVICUS Monitor, 5 February 2025, op. cit.

¹⁴ ‘Lawyers representing death row prisoners, activists and journalists face harassment in Singapore’, CIVICUS Monitor, 18 August 2022, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/lawyers-representing-death-row-prisoners-activists-and-journalists-face-harassment-singapore>.

¹⁵ ‘Singapore continues to silence dissent with suspension of human rights lawyer and investigation, harassment of activists’, CIVICUS Monitor, 27 April 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-continues-to-silence-dissent-with-suspension-of-human-rights-lawyer-and-investigation-harassment-of-activists>.

¹⁶ ‘The Singapore authorities continues its use of restrictive laws to harass critics and activists and stifle protests’, CIVICUS Monitor, 20 December 2022, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-authorities-continues-its-use-restrictive-laws-harass-critics-and-activists-and-stifle-protests>.

connected to a gathering held in February 2025 in support of Jolovan Wham during his court appearance.¹⁷

- 3.7** Han Hui Hui, who uses her blog and social media posts to raise awareness about the human rights situation in Singapore, has also been targeted. According to SAFEnet, the authorities have harassed her since 2013, including the threat of defamation charges if she did not remove social media posts.¹⁸ On 6 July 2025, she experienced harassment following the general election. She was confronted by a ruling party supporter who filmed her, physically pushed her and attempted to seize her belongings.¹⁹
- 3.8** In 2022, Zakir Hossain Khokan, a migrant worker and activist who founded two community groups and was active in local literary circles, was forced to leave Singapore after his work permit was not renewed. He has been vocal online and offline about discriminatory and exploitative treatment of migrant workers in Singapore.²⁰
- 3.9** Human rights lawyer M Ravi has been systematically targeted for many years for his defence of the rights of people on death row. In October 2022, police sent him a notice informing him they were investigating him for criminal defamation and scandalising the judiciary in posts related to the death penalty shared on his public Facebook page in April and May 2022.²¹ In March 2023, courts handed him a five-year suspension from practising as a lawyer under section 83(1)(b) of the Legal Profession Act 1986 for making 'grave and baseless accusations of improper conduct' against the Attorney-General, officers from the Attorney-General's Chambers and the Law Society.²² In November 2023, he was sentenced to 21 days in prison for contempt of court after accusing judges of being biased.²³
- 3.10** Authorities have also targeted journalists for their reporting. Terry Xu (see 3.4) has faced numerous charges, convictions and fines for publishing articles, many for their

¹⁷ 'Singapore: harassment and criminalisation of activists, the media and critics under the Public Order Act and POFMA ahead and after elections', CIVICUS Monitor, 5 August 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-harassment-and-criminalisation-of-activists-the-media-and-critics-under-the-public-order-act-and-pofma-ahead-and-after-elections>.

¹⁸ CIVICUS Monitor, 27 April 2023, op. cit.

¹⁹ CIVICUS Monitor, 5 August 2025, op. cit.

²⁰ 'MOM says migrant worker Zakir Hossain 'overstayed welcome'', cites 'false' public post in decision not to renew work pass', Today Online, 22 June 2022, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/migrant-worker-zakir-hossain-work-pass-not-renewed-mom-1930891>.

²¹ CIVICUS Monitor, 20 December 2022, op. cit.

²² The case and misconduct charges stem from an October 2020 online interview with M Ravi regarding the case of Malaysian national Gobi Avedian, who was sentenced to death in 2018. In the interview, Ravi expressed the view that the public prosecutor 'has been overzealous in his prosecution and that has led to the death sentence of Gobi'. CIVICUS Monitor, 27 April 2023, op. cit.

²³ 'Singapore: Authorities ban expression on Israel-Palestine conflict and use POFMA law to harass critics, block site', CIVICUS Monitor, 30 November 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-authorities-ban-expression-on-israel-palestine-conflict-and-use-pofma-law-to-harass-critics-block-site>.

critical stance towards the government.²⁴ Due to the continued harassment, TOC moved its operations out of Singapore and resumed publishing from Taiwan in September 2022, enabling it to continue to scrutinise the Singaporean authorities. In July 2023, authorities designated TOC a DOL under POFMA. The Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) imposed the designation after accusing TOC of publishing ‘multiple falsehoods’.²⁵ The DOL was set to expire in July 2025, but in June 2025 it was renewed until 2027.²⁶ Xu now faces a defamation lawsuit from Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam and Manpower Minister Tan See Leng, to be filed in Taiwan, related to the website’s December 2024 article on the purchase of properties in Singapore.²⁷

- 3.11** On 27 September 2025, exiled Hong Kong activist Nathan Law was denied entry to Singapore, to attend a closed-door conference, despite holding a valid visa. Law is a former Hong Kong legislator, who fled in 2020 after China imposed a sweeping national security law. He was granted asylum in the UK in 2021 and is among eight activists wanted by the Hong Kong authorities, who have offered bounties for information leading to their arrest. Law, now based in the UK, was detained for hours upon arrival, before being deported without explanation.²⁸

4. Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

- 4.1** Under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received 14 recommendations relating to freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. For example, the government pledged to ‘renew efforts in favour of freedom of expression, in particular freedom of the press’ and ‘ensure that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is protected, including via online public platforms’. It accepted three recommendations and noted 11 but has partly implemented only one recommendation.
- 4.2** Article 14 of the constitution includes strong safeguards to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression. However, in policy and practice this right is drastically subverted by a highly restrictive legal and regulatory regime

²⁴ ‘Singapore: Suppression of Activists, Critics Continues Ahead of Elections’, Amnesty International, 16 May 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa36/6788/2023/en>.

²⁵ CIVICUS Monitor, 18 August 2023, op. cit.

²⁶ ‘FORUM-ASIA: Renewed ban on The Online Citizen sparks concern over freedom of expression in Singapore’, TOC, 13 June 2025, <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2025/06/13/forum-asia-renewed-ban-on-the-online-citizen-sparks-concern-over-freedom-of-expression-in-singapore/>

²⁷ ‘Shanmugam, Tan See Leng accuse TOC’s Terry Xu of waging public sympathy campaign in defamation case’, Channel News Asia (CNA), 28 March 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/k-shanmugam-tan-see-leng-sue-toc-chief-editor-terry-xu-seeking-reach-him-in-taiwan-court-papers-5029836>.

²⁸ ‘Singapore denies entry to exiled HK pro-democracy activist’, BBC, 29 September 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8rv1r11y30o>

- 4.3** All domestic newspapers, radio stations and television channels are owned by companies linked to the government, meaning news coverage tends to support the government and state policies. The two main media organisations in Singapore are state investment-owned MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), which has close relations with the ruling party. MediaCorp operates all local television stations, while SPH monopolises digital and print newspapers. Singapore is ranked 123rd out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders 2025 World Press Freedom Index.²⁹
- 4.4** The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which operates under the MCI, has excessive discretion to suppress independent reporting and broadly control all forms of media and journalism. Principally, provisions of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1984,³⁰ Broadcasting Act 1994³¹ and Undesirable Publications Act 1967³² give the authorities wide powers to impose sanctions on broadcasters of content deemed critical of the government or offensive to public interest, order, national harmony, good taste and decency. The authorities also use POFMA to restrict online expression.
- 4.5** The 2019 Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) has been used to target and harass government critics for their online expression. Article 11 grants the authorities broad powers to order the correction of online content when there is a ‘false statement of fact’ that jeopardises the ‘public interest’, which is defined broadly and includes protecting Singapore’s ‘friendly relations’ with other countries, preventing the diminution of public confidence in the government, any statutory board or part of the government, or on the grounds of protecting ‘public tranquillity’. It authorises the minister to order internet service providers to issue a correction notice indicating that content is false, or to disable access to particular content if failed to do so. Section 32 allows the government to designate an online platform a Declared Online Location (DOL) for alleged ‘multiple

²⁹ Singapore, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/country/singapore>.

³⁰ The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) requires yearly renewal of licenses and empowers the authorities to limit the circulation of foreign newspapers. Under the NPPA, newspapers must issue management shares to government nominees, opening the door to government intervention over editorial direction and senior editorial appointments. ‘Newspaper and Printing Presses Act’, Singapore Statutes Online, 31 December 2002, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/NPPA1974>.

³¹ The Singapore government restricts online media via the Broadcasting Act. Under the Broadcasting Act, no one can provide ‘licensable broadcasting services’ without a licence issued by the IMDA. The law defines ‘licensable broadcasting services’ as including ‘computer online services that are provided by Internet Content Providers’, bringing blogs and websites within the act’s ambit. Provision of ‘licensable broadcasting services’ without a licence is punishable by with up to three years in prison or a fine of up to S\$200,000 (approx. US\$147,300). ‘Broadcasting Act’, Singapore Statutes Online, 31 August 2012, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/BA1994>.

³² The Undesirable Publications Act gives government officials sweeping authority to ban any broadly defined publication, including electronic information, that the government deems ‘obscene’ or ‘objectionable’, but provides vague definitions of what fall into categories such as being ‘injurious to the public good’. ‘Undesirable Publications Act’, Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/UPA1967>.

falsehoods'. This blocks platform operators from receiving any benefits, including financial ones, for up to two years.³³

- 4.6** Human rights groups have highlighted how the POFMA contains vague and overly broad provisions, offers unfettered discretion to ministers and government authorities and lacks clear protection for freedoms of expression, opinion and information.³⁴ Article 7(2)(c) stipulates severe criminal penalties, including up to 10 years' imprisonment, for anyone found guilty of breaking the law. Article 7(3)(d) requires social media companies to remove content or display prominent corrections at the government's direction on their platforms, or face fines of up to S\$1 million (approx. US\$776,000).
- 4.7** Since the law was passed it has been used against opposition politicians, government critics, civil society activists, independent news websites and journalists for online posts. As noted above (see 2.6), the law has been used against the TJC and its members.³⁵ It was also used against media outlets such as TOC (see 3.10), the Independent Singapore media outlet, in September 2022,³⁶ digital magazine Jom, in July 2023³⁷ and Bloomberg in December 2024.³⁸ Opposition party leader Kenneth Jeyaretnam has faced multiple POFMA correction orders for his opinions and views on issues in Singapore. His website, The Ricebowl Singapore, and his social media channels were also designated as DOLs.³⁹
- 4.8** FICA covers a wide range of conduct, activities and communications 'directed towards a political end in Singapore'. As a result, almost any form of expression and association relating to politics, social justice or other matters of public interest may fall within its ambit.⁴⁰ As noted above (see 2.7), it can be used to deem individuals or organisations as 'politically significant persons', and if an 'objectionable' political

³³ 'Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019', Singapore Statutes Online, 28 June 2019, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/POFMA2019?TransactionDate=20191001235959>.

³⁴ 'Dictating the Internet: A Human Rights Assessment of The Implementation of Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019', Singapore Dictating the Internet Legal Briefing 2021, October 2021, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Singapore-Dictating-the-Internet-Legal-Briefing-2021-ENG.pdf>.

³⁵ 'Singapore: End Harassment and Intimidation of Transformative Justice Collective', Human Rights Watch, 16 January 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/16/singapore-end-harassment-and-intimidation-transformative-justice-collective>.

³⁶ CIVICUS Monitor, 18 August 2022, op. cit.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 'Singapore: Bloomberg Gets POFMA Order Over Good Class Bungalow Article', CNA, 23 December 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/bloomberg-pofma-correction-direction-good-class-bungalows-transactions-4822536>.

³⁹ 'Singapore: new prime minister continues policy of silencing dissent by criminalising protesters and harassing critics', CIVICUS Monitor, 29 August 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-new-prime-minister-continues-policy-of-silencing-dissent-by-criminalising-protesters-and-harassing-critics>.

⁴⁰ 'Singapore passes draconian foreign interference law, rejects UN recommendations on civic space', CIVICUS Monitor, 24 November 2021, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-passes-draconian-foreign-interference-law-rejects-un-recommendations-civic-space>.

activity is undertaken in ‘collaboration with the foreign principal’ – a wide and ill-defined category – it may criminalise them. There is a lack of independent oversight over these restrictions and designations.⁴¹

- 4.9** The Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act,⁴² passed in November 2022, can also be used to restrict expression. It can force social media platforms to block online content. Its vague definition of ‘egregious content’ risks overly broad enforcement, including censorship of information that ‘advocates or instructs’ content ‘likely to cause feelings’ of racial or religious ill will or hostility, which can include legitimate reporting or advocacy discussing race and religion online.⁴³
- 4.10** The Online Criminal Harms Act 2023, passed in July 2023, enables the government to use arbitrary power and discretion against people and companies, including internet service providers, to remove, block and restrict content. The Act allows the government to target individuals and entities beyond Singapore’s borders, regardless of their location or Singaporean ties.⁴⁴
- 4.11** The authorities have also used the Penal Code to criminalise discourse on race and religion. In September 2023, rapper Subhas Nair was sentenced to six weeks in prison for peaceful online expression. He was convicted under Penal Code section 298(a) for attempting to ‘promote ill will’ between different racial groups in comments made on social media and in a video. Nair said that he was not trying to create enmity between groups, but was trying to call out racism and convey a message about the state of journalism in Singapore, specifically media bias and how some people and cases were reported.⁴⁵
- 4.12** In another case, former Reform Party chairman Charles Yeo was charged under Penal Code section 298 in 2022 for ‘hurting the religious feelings of Christians’ for his social media posts.⁴⁶ He is currently facing extradition from the UK on this and other charges.⁴⁷

⁴¹ CIVICUS Monitor, 24 November 2021, op. cit.

⁴² ‘Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2022’, Singapore Statutes Online, 21 December 2022, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Acts-Supp/38-2022/Published/20221221>.

⁴³ CIVICUS Monitor, 20 December 2022, op. cit.

⁴⁴ CIVICUS Monitor, 18 August 2023, op. cit.

⁴⁵ CIVICUS Monitor, 30 November 2023, op. cit.

⁴⁶ ‘Former chairman of Reform Party Charles Yeo charged with hurting religious feelings of Christians’, Straits Times, 19 January 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/reform-party-chairman-charles-yeo-charged-with-hurting-religious-feelings-of-christians?ref=inline-article>.

⁴⁷ ‘Charles Yeo claims Singapore is seeking his extradition from UK; AGC remains silent’, TOC, 29 October 2024, <https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2024/10/29/charles-yeo-claims-singapore-is-seeking-his-extradition-from-uk-agc-remains-silent>.

- 4.13** In February 2025, the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act was passed.⁴⁸ The law allows the Minister for Home Affairs to issue restraining orders against individuals or organisations responsible for creating or sharing content deemed to threaten racial harmony. There are concerns about the law's potential impact on freedom of expression and public discourse concerning racial issues and the vague and overly broad provisions that could disproportionately criminalise minorities discussing race and racism.⁴⁹
- 4.14** In a positive move, the government repealed the Sedition Act in October 2021.⁵⁰ This was a broadly worded law that imposed draconian restrictions on public discussions that allegedly incited 'hatred, contempt or disaffection' against the government, citizens and the administration of justice and promoted 'feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes'.
- 4.15** Censorship is rampant. Asia Sentinel, an independent website specialising in Asian news coverage, has been blocked since 2023, because of an article that was not to the government's liking.⁵¹ Authorities blocked the East Asia Forum, an Australia-based academic website, in 2023⁵² and 2025⁵³ for its articles on Singaporean politics. In January 2022, a book, *Red Lines: Political Cartoons and the Struggle Against Censorship*, was blocked from being released for images the authorities claimed were 'racially and religiously offensive'.⁵⁴ According to the International Commission of Jurists, IMDA codes and guidelines expressly restrict the dissemination of LGBTQI+-related expression and information online, particularly positive portrayals of LGBTQI+ people and issues.⁵⁵
- 4.16** In June 2025, the authorities pulled a production by theatre company Wild Rice just a day before it was due to be staged. IMDA said the production undermined

⁴⁸ 'Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act 2025', Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/MRHA2025/Uncommenced/20250710204435?DocDate=20250305>.

⁴⁹ 'Singapore: Online Criminal Harms Act Another Legal Instrument to Suppress Civic Space', Forum-Asia, 10 July 2023, <https://forum-asia.org/joint-statement-singapore-online-criminal-harms-act-another-legal-instrument-to-suppress-civic-space>.

⁵⁰ 'Singapore Parliament Repeals Sedition Act After 83 Years', The Straits Times, 5 October 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/singapore-parliament-repeals-sedition-act-after-83-years>.

⁵¹ 'Online Access to Asia Sentinel to Be Blocked in Singapore After Site Did Not Comply with Pofma Order', The Straits Times, 2 June 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/online-access-to-asia-sentinel-blocked-for-users-in-singapore-after-not-complying-with-pofma-orders>.

⁵² 'East Asia Forum's Website Blocked in Singapore Following Non-Compliance with Pofma Order', The Straits Times, 16 September 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/east-asia-forum-s-website-blocked-in-singapore-following-non-compliance-with-pofma-order>.

⁵³ 'Singapore blocks access to East Asia Forum for second time over POFMA order', CNA, 24 January 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/east-asia-forum-access-blocked-pofma-correction-direction-mddi-pmo-4894806>.

⁵⁴ CIVICUS Monitor, 12 April 2022, op. cit.

⁵⁵ *Silenced But Not Silent: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons' Freedom of Expression and Information Online in Southeast Asia*, International Commission of Jurists, July 2023, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ICJ-Silenced-But-Not-Silent-Report.pdf>.

Singapore's anti-drug stance, rehabilitation efforts and public trust.⁵⁶ In August 2025, two standup shows by Lebanese-Palestinian-US comedian Sammy Obeid were cancelled. Obeid alleged the IMDA rejected his script even after he complied with the required removals of references to Israel, Palestine and the Gaza conflict. He subsequently faced a correction order under POFMA. When he refused to do so, the government instructed Meta and Twitter/X to remove his posts critical of the government.⁵⁷

- 4.17** Civil society groups have continued to advocate for a freedom of information law to enable better access to information. However, the government has persistently rejected attempts to legislate on freedom of information, claiming it 'serves frivolous and nefarious purposes' while affirming the state's right to amass and control information.⁵⁸ It continues to use the Official Secrets Act 1935 to prevent the disclosure of official documents and information.⁵⁹

5. Freedom of peaceful assembly

- 5.1** During Singapore's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received three recommendations on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. It supported a recommendation to 'ensure that laws and policies on the rights to peaceful assembly comply with the relevant international human rights standards'. However, it noted the other two recommendations and has not implemented any of them.
- 5.2** Article 14 of the constitution states that 'all citizens of Singapore have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms'. Despite these legal guarantees, the government has put in place several stringent limitations that have had a chilling effect on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- 5.3** The authorities have systematically used the POA,⁶⁰ which aims to regulate assemblies and processions in public places, to restrict peaceful assembly. They have regularly used it to harass and investigate activists and critics for expressing their views and organising peaceful gatherings, including solo protests.
- 5.4** POA article 7 requires a police permit for any gathering or meeting of one or more people intending to demonstrate for or against a group or government, publicise a cause or campaign, or mark or commemorate any event. The only outdoor venue

⁵⁶ CIVICUS Monitor, 5 August 2025, op. cit.

⁵⁷ 'US comedian Sammy Obeid fails to comply with POFMA correction order; Meta, X directed to take action', CNA, 4 September 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/sammy-obeid-pofma-meta-x-targeted-correction-direction-imda-mddi-censorship-5332381>.

⁵⁸ 'Singapore Seeks Accountability Without Transparency', 360info, 3 October 2022, <https://360info.org/singapore-seeks-accountability-without-transparency>.

⁵⁹ 'Official Secrets Act 1935', Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/osa1935>.

⁶⁰ 'Public Order Act', Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/POA2009>.

where an assembly may be held without a police permit is Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim Park, a green space in the city centre. The law covers outdoor gatherings and those held indoors if they are in a place open to the public, or if the public is invited.

- 5.5** Under the POA, the commissioner of police may refuse to grant a permit if they have 'reasonable ground' for believing the proposed assembly or procession will create a public nuisance, give rise to an obstruction in any public road, place the safety of any person in jeopardy, or cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will, or hostility between different groups, along with other grounds. These provisions are overly broad and inconsistent with international human rights law.
- 5.6** Under the Public Order Regulations 2009,⁶¹ organisers must apply for a permit at least 14 days in advance of an event. Punishments for breaches of the regulations include a fine of up to S\$20,000 (approx. US\$15,540), imprisonment for up to a year, or both.⁶² POA article 7(2)(h) also provides the police commissioner with specific authority to reject any permit application for an assembly or procession 'directed towards a political end' if any foreigner is found to be involved.⁶³
- 5.7** As noted in Section 3 of this submission, the authorities have used the POA to harass and criminalise HRDs. Over the last two years it has been used to restrict gatherings and protests in support of Palestine. In October 2023, the authorities announced that events and public assemblies related to the Israel-Palestine conflict will not be permitted, citing 'safety and security reasons.'⁶⁴ In November 2023, they rejected five applications to use Speakers' Corner for such events. In June 2024, three activists, Siti Amirah Mohamed Asrori, Mossammad Sobikun Nahar and Annamalai Kokila Parvathi, were charged under the POA for allegedly organising a procession to express solidarity with Palestine without a permit. The three were part of a group of 70 people who had walked to the office of the president in February 2024 with the aim of delivering letters to the prime minister on the Palestine issue.⁶⁵ At the time of writing they were on trial.

⁶¹ 'Public Order Regulations 2009', Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/POA2009-S487-2009?DocDate=20200625>.

⁶² 'Singapore: Authorities given broad new powers to police protests', Amnesty International, 4 April 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/singapore-authorities-given-broad-new-powers-to-police-protests>.

⁶³ 'Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys: Suppression of Free Expression and Assembly in Singapore', Human Rights Watch, December 2017, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/singapore1217_web.pdf.

⁶⁴ CIVICUS Monitor, 30 November 2023, op. cit.

⁶⁵ 'Singapore: harassment of pro-Palestinian, anti-death penalty Activism and misuse of POFMA law to silence dissent', CIVICUS Monitor, 5 April 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/singapore-harassment-of-pro-palestinian-anti-death-penalty-activism-and-misuse-of-pofma-law-to-silence-dissent>; 'Despite restrictions, the Palestine solidarity movement has continued to mobilise', CIVICUS Lens interview, 11 September 2025, <https://lens.civicus.org/interview/despite-restrictions-the-palestine-solidarity-movement-has-continued-to-mobilise>.

- 5.8** On 16 January 2025, police said they were investigating a memorial in solidarity with Palestine installed at the National University of Singapore (NUS). It featured 124 pairs of shoes and a white burial shroud placed outside the CREATE research building at NUS, which houses the Singapore-Hebrew University Alliance for Research and Education. On 27 February 2025, the police raided the homes of six people aged between 21 and 28 to investigate their alleged involvement in the installation.⁶⁶
- 5.9** In October 2022, police launched an investigation under the POA against nine migrant workers who protested about unpaid wages outside a building in Ang Mo Kio.⁶⁷ On 26 May 2025, authorities charged Lune Loh, a trans woman, with two offences under the POA: section 15(2) for holding a protest in a prohibited area and section 16(2) for holding a one person protest without a permit.⁶⁸

6. Recommendations to the Government of Singapore

CIVICUS and FORUM-ASIA call on the Government of Singapore to create and maintain, in law and in practice, an enabling environment for civil society, in accordance with the rights enshrined in international human rights law and standards, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Council resolutions 22/6, 27/5 and 27/31.

At a minimum, the following conditions should be guaranteed: freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, the right for civil society to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and access information and the right to seek and secure funding.

In the light of this, the following specific recommendations are made:

6.1 Freedom of association

- Take measures to foster a safe and enabling environment for civil society, including by removing legal and policy measures that unwarrantedly limit the right to association.
- Amend the Societies Act to remove undue restrictions on freedom of association, in compliance with international human rights law and standards. In particular, amend provisions of the Societies Act that require mandatory registration and provide the government with wide discretion to dissolve or

⁶⁶ CIVICUS Monitor, 5 August 2025, op. cit.

⁶⁷ CIVICUS Monitor, 20 December 2022, op. cit.

⁶⁸ CIVICUS Monitor, 5 August 2025, op. cit.

sanction CSOs. The legislation should provide a clear legal basis for denying registration, with an explicit and limited number of justifiable grounds compatible with international human rights law and standards.

- Guarantee the effective and independent functioning of autonomous trade unions by removing undue limitations and restrictions in the Trade Unions Act to form, join and register unions and ensure an enabling environment for migrant workers to join and hold positions in trade unions.

6.2 Protection of civil society activists, human rights defenders and journalists

- Ensure a safe and enabling environment in which society civil activists, HRDs and journalists can carry out their work. To this end, ratify the ICCPR and other human rights treaties and establish an independent national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles to promote and protect human rights.
- Ensure HRDs are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear or undue hindrance, obstruction, or legal and administrative harassment.
- Repeal or amend legalisation and decrees that impose unwarranted restrictions on the legitimate work of HRDs, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other international human rights laws and standards.
- Repeal or amend the Public Order Act and the 2017 Administration of Justice (Protection) Act, in accordance with the ICCPR and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
- Drop charges or quash convictions against HRDs, journalists and bloggers for exercising their fundamental rights to freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, and review their cases to prevent further harassment.
- Establish mechanisms that protect HRDs by adopting a specific law on the protection of HRDs and activists, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 27/31.

6.3 Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

- Ensure the freedom of expression and media freedom by aligning all national legislation with international human rights law and standards.
- Review and amend the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, Broadcasting Act and Undesirable Publications Act to ensure these laws are in line with

international human rights law and standards and good practices in the area of freedom of expression.

- Reform all laws including the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act, the Online Criminal Harms Act, the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act and the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, in conformity with international human rights law and standards.
- Ensure journalists and writers are able to work freely and without fear of retribution for expressing critical opinions or covering topics the government may deem sensitive.
- Lift restrictions on freedom of expression and adopt a comprehensive framework for the protection of journalists.

6.4 Freedom of peaceful assembly

- Amend the Public Order Act 2009 in order to guarantee fully the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, in line with international human rights law and standards. In particular, ensure there is no discrimination against non-Singaporeans to exercise their right to protest and remove restrictions in the Public Order Act that are inconsistent with international standards on the place, content and modalities of assemblies.
- Remove requirements for explicit prior permission for peaceful assemblies in favour of a simple notification regime, as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association in his 2012 report.
- Drop charges against all protesters, HRDs and journalists prosecuted for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and review their cases to prevent further harassment.

6.5 Access by UN Special Procedures mandate holders

- Extend a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedure mandate holders and prioritise official visits by the: 1) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; 2) Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; 3) Special Rapporteur on the Rights

to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association; 4) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; and 5) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

6.6 State engagement with civil society

- Include CSOs in the UPR process before finalising and submitting the national report.
- Systematically consult with civil society on the implementation of UPR recommendations, including by holding periodical comprehensive consultations with a diverse range of civil society stakeholders.
- Incorporate the results of this UPR into action plans for the promotion and protection of all human rights, taking into account the proposals of civil society, and present a midterm evaluation report to the Human Rights Council on the implementation of the recommendations of this session.
- Publicly commit to refraining from undertaking reprisals against CSOs and individuals engaging with international human rights bodies and mechanisms and reviewing, amending or repealing laws that have the aim or effect of deterring or hindering cooperation with the United Nations;
- Create a safe and enabling environment for civil society to operate freely and independently.

7. Annex: Assessment of implementation of civic space recommendations under the 3rd cycle

Recommendation	Position	Assessment/Comments on level of implementation
59.182 Remove all existing obstacles to the registration of LGBTI organizations (Norway); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Supported	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 2
59.166 Ensure full respect for the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association by taking measures to enhance the security of civil society, journalists and human rights defenders (Uruguay); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 3
59.163 Take appropriate measures to ease restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media online and offline (Slovakia); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.164 Introduce a freedom of information provision guaranteeing access to public information and data (Switzerland); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.165 End the use of legal and administrative actions, including criminal defamation lawsuits that curb freedom of expression and peaceful assembly (United States of America); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.167 Ensure the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression through the revision of the Internal Security Act and the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, in order to eliminate media censorship and prevent self-censorship (Belgium); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4

59.169 Amend the legislation that restricts the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly to ensure that the legislation complies with international human rights standards (Finland); Review relevant legislation that may unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression or peaceful assembly, in line with international standards (Iceland); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.170 Renew efforts in favour of freedom of expression, in particular freedom of the press (France); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Supported	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.171 Ensure that freedom of opinion and expression, as well as peaceful assembly, are protected (Italy); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Supported	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.172 Amend article 14 of the Constitution so that it clearly proclaims press freedom and freedom of expression and information without any restriction (Netherlands);	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.173 Ensure that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is protected, including via online public platforms (New Zealand); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Supported	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.174 Review the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (Bahamas); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.175 Review and amend the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act to establish an independent body to review possible cases of disinformation and to ensure consistency with accepted principles of international law (Canada); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4

59.176 Repeal the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (Denmark); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
59.177 Amend or repeal the Sedition Act, the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act and the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act to ensure that they comply with international human rights standards (Germany); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Partially implemented Source: Section 3/4
59.178 Review the operation of the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act and the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act to ensure that they do not interfere with the right to freedom of expression (Ireland); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 3/4
59.162 Ensure that laws and policies on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association comply with the relevant international human rights standards (Republic of Korea); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Supported	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 5
59.161 Implement measures increasing protection, in law and in practice, for exercising freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association (Poland); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 5
59.168 Ensure the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression, eliminate media censorship and allow peaceful demonstrations without undue restrictions (Czechia); Source of position: A/HRC/48/16/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 5