



Apa Itu Activist?

A FORUM ON CIVIL SOCIETY
ACTION & ADVOCACY

1. Introduction & Overview

In Singapore's rapidly evolving political environment, many different groups and individuals are working hard to create change on issues that they care about. But too often we do this in isolation – only to find ourselves firefighting and reinventing the wheel, instead of drawing on shared learning or mutual support.

The “Apa Itu Activist?” Forum hopes to address this. This event aims to bring together anyone who is involved or interested in advocacy, to share experiences and strategies, hopefully with a view to increase mutual communication and support, build relationships and conduct more effective advocacy. Its tongue-in-cheek name has been chosen to reflect the fact that Singapore society is still evolving to come to terms with the appropriate role that advocacy should play and the forms it can take.

The conference will involve informative plenary sessions of general relevance to advocates, as well as small-group panels delving into specific areas of advocacy experience and strategy in greater detail. This event has been organised by several active civil society participants and activists.

Date: 20 September 2014

Time: 9am – 5:30pm

Venue: Ngee Ann Kong Si Auditorium and seminar rooms 2 and 3 at UTown

2. Forum Schedule

Morning Session (plenaries)

TIME	CONTENT	PANEL
9.30 – 10.45	What could civil society look like? Perspectives from home and abroad	J. Michael Cole (Taiwan) Syahredzan Johan (Malaysia) Vivienne Wee (Singapore)
10.45 – 11.15	Coffee Break	
11.15 – 12.30	Civil society in Singapore: Possibilities and constraints	Nazry Bahrawi Remy Choo Zheng Xi Tay Lai Hock Siew Kum Hong

Afternoon Session (small groups)

TIME	CONTENT	PANEL
12.30 – 1.30	Food	
1.30 – 3.00 (A)	Influencing public opinion through the media	Radha Basu Boo Jun Feng Jolene Tan
1.30 – 3.00 (B)	Influencing policy-makers: the inside track	Chua Ai Lin Shawn Lum Louis Ng Eugene Tan
3.00 – 3.30	Coffee Break	
3.30 – 5.00 (C)	An effective civil society: Community engagement for social change	Kokila Annamalai Koh Hui Ling Jolovan Wham
3.30 – 5.00 (D)	An effective civil society: Pushing state boundaries	Alex Au Braema Mathi Teo Soh Lung Vincent Wijesingha
5.00 – 5.30	What has been helpful? What do we want in the future?	Participants from afternoon panels

3. Speakers at a Glance

What could civil society look like? Perspectives from home and abroad



J. MICHAEL COLE has been covering Taiwanese civil society as a journalist and photographer for a variety of Taiwanese and international publications, writing more than 100 articles on the subject. He was one of the pre-eminent chroniclers of the Sunflower Movement's occupation of the Legislative Yuan in March/April 2014.



SYAHREDZAN JOHAN is on the Bar Council Malaysia and Malaysian Bar, where he is an activist with the MyConstitution campaign and the Chairperson of the National Young Lawyers Committee. He writes regularly for LoyarBurok, a blog dedicated to freedom of speech and conducts courses and takes up public interest cases for the Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights. He is also a spokesperson for Projek BERES, a collective movement proposing constitutional and electoral reforms, and often writes articles that have been published in the mainstream media.



VIVIENNE WEE is AWARE's second Research and Advocacy Director. A founding member of AWARE, Vivienne previously served on at least five Executive Committees and several subcommittees. She formerly chaired the national task force 'Stop Violence Against Women!', led by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations. As an anthropologist, Vivienne has worked extensively on gender and development. She taught at the National University of Singapore, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and City University of Hong Kong. She is currently Associate Faculty at SIM University (UniSIM). She has been involved in several multi-country networks and programmes, spanning Indonesia, Pakistan as well as countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Civil society in Singapore: Possibilities and constraints



NAZRY BAHRAWI is a literary and cultural critic who has written for Today, The Guardian and South China Morning Post. He is also the associate editor of Critical Muslim, a UK-based quarterly magazine of ideas and issues, which presents Muslim perspectives on the great debates of our times.



REMY CHOO ZHENG XI co-founded the socio-political news website The Online Citizen in 2006 and is a lawyer in private practice specializing in criminal defence and public interest litigation. Zheng Xi is active in free speech and media advocacy, and was a founding member of the #FreeMyInternet campaign in 2013.



TAY LAI HOCK is the founder and Kampung Chief of Ground-Up Initiative (GUI). G.U.I. aims to build a 5G society – Gracious, Green, Giving, Grounded and Grateful. At the core of GUI's 21st Century Kampung Culture is creating beautiful connections between people and the Earth. Since 2008, GUI has built a Kampung through the power of community and has nurtured highly creative and resilient kindred spirits.



SIEW KUM HONG is the Vice-President of Singapore human rights NGO MARUJAH. He was a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2007 – 2009, and a core team member of The Online Citizen from 2011 to 2013. He was recently part of the Singapore Advocacy Awards committee.

Influencing public opinion through media



RADHA BASU is a Senior Correspondent with the Straits Times, frequently writing news articles, features and commentaries that document concerns such as gender equality, fertility, aging, discrimination, income inequality, family violence and the gender wage gap. She is particularly passionate about raising awareness about marginalised groups such as migrant workers and the working poor. A three-time finalist at the international journalism awards given out by the Society of Publishers in Asia, she has won top awards twice, including for Excellence in Human Rights Reporting for her expose on human trafficking in Singapore.



BOO JUNFENG is a filmmaker whose works, often dealing with themes of identity, sexuality and memory, have won him acclaim at film festivals around the world. He is also a committee member of Pink Dot, contributing to the campaign's videos, messaging and creative direction every year.



JOLENE TAN is Programmes and Communications Senior Manager at AWARE. She co-founded the ‘No To Rape’ campaign against marital immunity for rape and was previously on the team running UK-based feminist magazine *The F Word* (2010-2014). She holds a B.A. in Law from Cambridge University and an LL.M. from Harvard Law School. Her first novel, *A Certain Exposure*, was published by Epigram Books in April 2014.

Influencing policy-makers: the inside track



CHUA AI LIN is the President of the Singapore Heritage Society and currently serves on the National Library Advisory Committee. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge and was previously an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, National University of Singapore.



SHAWN LUM has been a member of the Nature Society (Singapore) for 20 years and has served as its President since 2008. He is a botanist by training and lectures in plant biology and environmental issues at the National Institute of Education. Though hailing from Honolulu, Hawaii, Singapore has been home for Shawn since 1990, and participating in civil society activities for most of that time has strengthened his ties Singapore and the region. Furthermore, NGO work has provided insights into Singapore society that would not have been possible through work alone.



LOUIS NG is the Founder and Chief Executive of ACRES, a Singapore based charity advocating for an end to animal cruelty in Asia. Louis received his Bachelor of Science in Biology from the National University of Singapore and his Masters of Science in Primate Conservation from the Oxford Brookes University. In 2011, Louis received the inaugural Yahoo! Singapore 9 award in 2011, which recognises nine Singaporeans who really made a difference in the past year. In 2007, Louis was presented with The Outstanding Young Persons of Singapore award. In 2002, Louis received the HSBC / NYAA Youth Environmental Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation in Singapore.



EUGENE K.B. TAN is an associate professor of law at the School of Law, Singapore Management University (SMU). An advocate and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore, Eugene is a graduate of the National University of Singapore, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Stanford University where he was a Fulbright Fellow. At the SMU, besides constitutional and administrative law, he regularly teaches core courses on business ethics and social responsibility at the undergraduate and graduate (graduate diploma, MBA, and EMBA), and executive education levels. His inter-disciplinary research interests include the mutual interaction of law and public policy, the government and politics of Singapore, and the regulation of ethnic conflict.

An effective civil society: community engagement for social change



KOKILA ANNAMALAI is the Campaign Coordinator for Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), where she heads the Singapore chapter of We Can! End All Violence Against Women, a global movement against gender violence. She has previously worked as the communications executive at AWARE and is deeply passionate about human rights, social justice and sustainable community development.



KOH HUI LING is the Associate Artistic Director of Drama Box. Hui Ling believes in the humanistic value of education and aspires to touch people with her work. She founded ARTivate – the youth wing of Drama Box – in 2007, with the aim of grooming the next batch of young artists for the theatre industry. She completed her Masters of Arts in Applied Drama (Distinction) at University of Exeter, UK in 2010. In 2013, Hui Ling was awarded the Young Artist Award by National Arts Council Singapore and the Singapore Youth Award by National Youth Council.



JOLOVAN WHAM is Executive Director of the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), a non-governmental organisation based in Singapore which deals with issues concerning migrant worker's rights and human trafficking. It runs shelters, help desks, helplines, training programmes and is involved in research, education and campaigns. After completing his undergraduate studies in Social Work at the National University of Singapore, he played a key role in the founding of the organisation and running its current programmes and initiatives.

An effective civil society: pushing state boundaries



ALEX AU is the author behind the Yawning Bread blog, where he provides analyses of Singaporean politics, culture, gay issues and miscellaneous subjects. He is also one of the founding members of Singapore's main gay equality lobby group People Like Us: Sexual Minorities in Singapore and the founder of the Singapore's Gay News List, the first discussion forum for Singapore's gay community. In 2013, Alex was made Vice President of Transient Workers Count Too, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving conditions for low-wage migrant workers.



BRAEMA MATHI is a consultant on communication, advocacy and programmes for the non-profit and profit-oriented sectors. She leads human rights group MARUAH, co-founded Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) and was formerly a President of AWARE (The Association of Women for Action and Research). She served two terms as Nominated Member of Parliament. Braema has also worked as a teacher, a researcher, in journalism and in senior management in government and private sectors.



TEO SOH LUNG graduated from the University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) in 1973 and was one of the founders of the Law Society's Criminal Legal Aid Scheme in 1985. She was the chairperson of the Legislation Committee (Special Assignments) of the Law Society in 1986. One of the bills the committee reported on was the Newspaper & Printing Presses Amendment Bill, 1985 which sought to restrict the sale of foreign publications in Singapore. That report was one of the reasons why the entire committee was summoned to testify before the parliamentary select committee. She is a member of Function 8, an initiative which hopes to restart the process of critical thinking, share experiences and reclaim our human rights.



VINCENT WIJEYSINGHA is an academic, civil activist and politician, having previously served as the Executive Director of Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), a non-government organisation advocating the rights of low-waged migrant workers. He also publishes scholarly papers on social work and has worked as a lecturer in social work at SIM University. Vincent is currently working with the group Workfair Singapore, an organization concerned about the rights of Singaporeans and migrant workers.

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