



# 1988 Statement of Ex-Detainees of 'Operation Spectrum'

## STATEMENT OF EX-DETAINEES OF OPERATION "SPECTRUM" Embargoed until 10 a.m. 18th April 1988

### PREAMBLE

We, the undersigned, were detained by the Internal Security Department (ISD) on 21 May and 20 June 1987 and released in stages under Suspension Directives and/or Restriction Orders in June, September and December 1987.

While we had privately always maintained our innocence and kept a rueful and fearful silence on the unjust treatment we were subjected to, and would have been inclined to keep our 'silence', the Government has since repeatedly raised the issue of our arrests and detention and made false and damaging statements about us.

On the one hand we had been intimidated by implicit and explicit threats against our safety should we speak up on our arrests and detention. On the other hand the Government and its spokesmen have continued to make bold and untruthful statements regarding the reasons for our arrests and detention and have denied that any of us had been subjected to ill-treatment or torture.

We make this statement now because of this constant barrage of Government taunts and its public invitation to speak the truth on the conditions we were subjected to under arrest and detention.

We make this statement as principled men and women who will speak the truth and state our position for the record.

In making this statement, we do not intend to challenge the Government; we do not seek any official response; neither is there any desire to make "political capital" of this. Our sole purpose in making this statement is to clear our names.

### STATEMENT

We are accused of being involved in an alleged "Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore, using communist united front tactics, with a view to establishing a Marxist state".

We categorically DENY the Government's accusation against us.

We have never been Marxist conspirators involved in any conspiracy.

We were never a clandestine communist or marxist network and many of us did not even know or know of one another before the arrests.

We were rather community and Church workers, legal reformers, amateur dramatists, helpers of the Workers' Party, professionals and ordinary citizens exercising our constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association in Singapore.

We have never propagated, in words or in action, a communist state for Singapore. Rather, we had, through open and legitimate organisations and legitimate means, advocated more democracy, less elitism, protection of individual freedoms and civil rights, greater concern for the poor and the less privileged, and less interference in the private lives of citizens.

We hold completely the beliefs expressed by fellow ex-detainee Chew Kheng Chuan in his representation to the ISA Advisory Board, where he stated and we paraphrase : "... (we are believers) in an open and



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democratic polity and in the virtues of an open and accountable government. (We) strongly believe that for a society to be meaningfully called democratic, interest and action in politics cannot be the sole prerogative of the professional politician. A citizen of a democracy, to be worthy of that society, has not just the right, but indeed the duty to participate in the political life of his or her society. It is a grave danger to democracy to suggest that for one to comment on political and social issues or to hold differing political opinions, one should go and form a political party to take on the government! Has the citizen no political voice, other than a vote once in every four years, that cannot be articulated freely and responsibly, but only through the medium of a professional politician? Such is a situation even worse than that of the common man’s crippling dependency on “experts” – whether plumber or temple medium. It will lead to a society where only the authorised, registered, professionally-affiliated expert can comment on the subject under his or her purview”.

We believe that as with the case of the individual citizen, so too has an organisation this same legitimate role to play in the democratic life of our country.

Absurdly, it seemed to us that we were arrested and detained for the legitimate exercise of our rights as citizens through registered and open organisations. We did not infiltrate these organisations but joined them as members, volunteers and full-time workers. Neither did we use these organisations as fronts to propagate subversive activities. All activities carried out by these organisations are legitimate, open and approved by elected executive committees, whose members clearly stand in their own right as capable, autonomous and intelligent individuals.

Neither were we “instructed” by any person or organisation, not Tan Wah Piow, Paul Lim nor Vincent Cheng, nor any political party to do what we did in our respective activities or groups.

### TREATMENT DURING DETENTION

During our detention, we were subjected to treatment which should never be meted out to any person under interrogation.

Following our sudden arrests, we were subjected to harsh and intensive interrogation, deprived of sleep and rest, some of us for as long as 70 hours inside freezing cold rooms. All of us were stripped of our personal clothing, including spectacles, footwear and underwear and made to change into prisoners’ uniforms.

Most of us were made to stand continually during interrogation, some of us for over 20 hours and under the full blast of airconditioning turned to a very low temperature.

Under these conditions, one of us was repeatedly doused with cold water during interrogation.

Most of us were hit hard in the face, some of us for not less than 50 times, while others were assaulted on other parts of the body, during the first three days of interrogation.

We were threatened with more physical abuse during interrogation. We were threatened with the arrests, assault and battery of our spouses, loved ones and friends. We were threatened with INDEFINITE detention without trial. Chia Thye Poh, who is still in detention after twenty two years, was cited as an example. We were told that no one could help us unless we “co-operated” with the ISD.

These threats were constantly on our minds during the time we wrote our respective “statements” in detention.

We were actively discouraged from engaging legal counsel and advised to discharge our lawyers and against taking legal action (including making representations to the ISA Advisory Board) so as not to jeopardise our chances of release.

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We were compelled to appear on television and warned that our release would depend on our performances on television. We were coerced to make statements such as "I am Marxist-inclined .."; "My ideal society is a classless society .."; "so-and-so is my mentor .."; "I was made use of by so-and-so.." in order to incriminate ourselves and other detainees.

What we said on television were grossly distorted and misrepresented by editing and commentaries which attributed highly sinister motives to our actions and associations.

We state once more clearly and unequivocally, we never acted in any way to subvert the security of our country; we were never a part of any Marxist conspiracy to bring about a communist state. If necessary, we would be willing to prove our innocence in an open trial.

We consider ourselves nothing less than some of the most loyal and responsible citizens of Singapore. We greatly regret not our past actions but the fact that our Government felt it necessary to malign our good names and arrest, detain and abuse us for what we did or did not do.

Signed  
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TANG LAY LEE

Signed  
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YAP HON NGIAN

Signed  
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KENNETH TSANG

Signed  
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WONG SOUK YEE

Signed  
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TEO SOH LUNG

Signed  
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KEVIN DE SOUZA

Signed  
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NG BEE LENG

Signed  
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f TANG FONG HAR

Signed  
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CHNG SUAN TZE