

CALD Statement welcoming the decision of District Judge John Ng in acquitting Singapore Democrat leaders

CALD is elated with the unexpected decision of District Judge John Ng to acquit Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) leaders and human rights activists Gandhi Ambalam, John Tan, Chee Siok Chin, Charles Tan and Chong Kai Xiong last October 6, 2009.

The group, charged with conducting a procession without a permit under Rule 5 of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order & Nuisance) and (Assemblies & Processions) Rules, wearing shirts with the words 'Democracy Now' and 'Freedom Now' and with a picture of lighted candle had walked from the Speaker's Corner along North Bridge Road to Parliament House and then along Bras Basah Road to the Istana and then along Orchard Road to the Queenstown Remand Prison on September 16, 2007. They were also conducting a vigil for Dr. Chee Soon Juan, SDP secretary general and current CALD Chair, who was at that time for speaking in public.

CALD welcomes the decision of Judge Ng for looking into the merits of the case. Judge Ng said that the walk "did not cause inconvenience to the public, affect traffic flow or make noise which disturbed the public peace."

However, it is regrettable that Judge Ng did not categorically rule that the Government's complete ban on outdoor political activities contravenes the Singapore Constitution which guaranteed the right of the citizens to freedom of speech, association and assembly except in emergency conditions.

While the case was dismissed, CALD firmly supports SDP in its resolve that taking part in processions and assemblies in Singapore is part of the fundamental rights of citizens provided for in the Constitution as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. CALD, likewise, continues to enshrine the belief that democracy's strength lies in greater political spaces of freedom of expression, respect for human rights, tolerance of legitimate dissent, and the independence of the judiciary.