

PRESS RELEASE**Human Rights Watch's Refusal to Publicly Defend its Report**

1. We refer to the remarks made on Human Rights Watch (HRW) by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods on 23 March, and the accompanying press release by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament.
2. The Ministry of Law notes that serious allegations have been made to the Select Committee, against HRW and its work. Questions have been raised about how its board is appointed; the influence that donors have; its links to the US foreign policy establishment; and the serious inaccuracies, misimpressions, untrue statements in its Report - "Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys" – Suppression of Free Expression and Assembly in Singapore".
3. HRW puts itself out as an independent, objective and transparent human rights organisation. Appearing before the Select Committee would give HRW the chance to vindicate itself and set out its views. HRW will be able to speak directly to the elected representatives of Singaporeans, in a public setting, with local and international media present. What is more, whatever HRW said to the Select Committee would be fully protected by the laws of parliamentary privilege.
4. HRW will also be able to defend its Report in public.
5. But HRW has chosen not to appear before the Select Committee. HRW's initial willingness to appear before the Select Committee evaporated once it was informed that its representative should be prepared to answer questions about its Report. HRW remained unwilling to appear even after it was further informed that another submission had charged that its Report was full of falsehoods. This was despite the fact that HRW was told that it could come and give evidence on any date between 15-29 March, a period of 14 days. It was also offered travel funding, which is offered to all overseas witnesses who appear at the Select Committee. HRW was also told that if its officers could not come to Singapore, they could give its evidence via video-conference on any day between 15-29 March.
6. HRW's stance is disappointing, but not surprising. HRW has a pattern of issuing biased and untruthful statements about Singapore. It knows that its Report will not withstand any scrutiny, and has therefore chosen not to come to Singapore to publicly defend its views.
7. HRW, by its conduct, has shown that it cannot be taken seriously as a commentator or interlocutor on issues relating to Singapore.

MINISTRY OF LAW
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Annex A - Remarks by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods, Mr Charles Chong, at the 23 March 2018 Hearing

1. Before we move on to the next witness I would like to place a number of facts on the record.
2. This Committee has heard PAP Policy Forum (PPF) and NGO Monitor make serious criticisms against Human Rights Watch. In particular, PPF's written representation has criticised HRW's report "*Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys*" – *Suppression of Free Expression and Assembly in Singapore*, and pointed out that the Report contains many falsehoods.
3. Before hearing this evidence, we had unanimously decided, at our meeting on 5 March, to invite Human Rights Watch (HRW) to give oral evidence.
4. HRW initially agreed to give evidence. It agreed to come on 23 March. HRW was then informed that its representative should be able to deal with questions on its Report. Once it was notified of this, HRW replied that "since our last communication the staff member best able to address these issues has made other travel plans that cannot be changed".
5. Parliament Secretariat subsequently offered to fund the costs of HRW's representative flying in, or to arrange for video-conferencing at any time between 15 and 29 March. That is over a period of 14 days. But HRW has indicated that it remains unavailable to give oral evidence, either in person, through one of its officers, or via video conference.
6. I have asked Parliament Secretariat to issue a chronology of the exchange with HRW.
7. For the record, our invitation to HRW still stands. Should HRW decide that it is willing to give oral evidence to defend its Report, whether in person or by video-conferencing, it is welcome to write to us.

Annex B - Press Release by the Office of Clerk of Parliament**SELECT COMMITTEE ON
DELIBERATE ONLINE FALSEHOODS – CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES
AND COUNTERMEASURES****Chronology of the Exchange with Human Rights Watch**

1. This chronology of the exchange with HRW is issued following the remarks made on Human Rights Watch by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods, Mr Charles Chong, today (see ANNEX).
2. On 5 March 2018 (Monday), the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods decided to invite Human Rights Watch (HRW) to give oral evidence at the Select Committee's public hearings. On the same day, Parliament Secretariat sent an invitation to Shayna Bauchner, the coordinator of HRW's Asia Division. The invitation asked if HRW was willing to appear before the Select Committee to give oral evidence, and if so, on which of the 8 hearing dates set aside by the Select Committee (14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 27, 28 and 29 March) was HRW's representative available.
3. On 8 March (Thursday), HRW replied, indicating that it was willing to send a representative to be present at the public hearing on 23 March. On 8 March (Thursday), Parliament Secretariat asked if HRW was able to appear at the public hearing on 27 March instead. On 10 March (Saturday), HRW replied that its representative would only be available to give evidence at a session on 23 March, and asked if that remained an option.
4. On 13 March (Tuesday), Parliament Secretariat confirmed that 23 March was available. HRW was also informed that its representative should be able to deal with questions that might arise, including HRW's report *"Kill the Chicken to Scare the Monkeys" – Suppression of Free Expression and Assembly in Singapore* (HRW Report) which covered some issues relating to freedom of expression.
5. On 14 March (Wednesday), HRW replied that "since our last communication the staff member best able to address these issues has made other travel plans that cannot be changed". HRW offered to submit written evidence, or to meet with Government officials in Singapore or London. On the same day Parliament Secretariat replied to reiterate the offer of appearing on any of the 8 hearing dates.
6. On 15 March (Thursday), HRW substantially repeated its email of 14 March (see paragraph above), indicating its unavailability. On the same day, Parliament Secretariat replied, informing HRW that it can send one of its officers, on any day between 15 and 29 March, at any time. HRW was also told that if it could not send one of its officers, then video-conferencing can be arranged at any time between 15 and 29 March, so that its officers will not have to travel. It was also pointed out to HRW that the Select Committee had received a submission which was highly critical of the HRW Report and considered the Report to be full of falsehoods.

7. On 16 March, Parliament Secretariat sent another email, adding that funding was available should HRW decide to send a representative to Singapore.

8. On 19 March, HRW replied that it was unable to participate and did not take up the offer of video-conferencing.

**Office of the Clerk of Parliament
Singapore, 23 March 2018**