

PUBLIC STATEMENT ISSUED ON THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION COLDSTORE

We, the undersigned former political prisoners, affirm and support Dr Poh Soo Kai's statement below. We ask for an apology from the People's Action Party (PAP) government and reparation, whether symbolic or substantive, for physical and psychological mistreatment, and consequential deprivation of livelihood suffered by some of us during and after our imprisonment without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The ISA has to be abolished. It has been used by the PAP government repeatedly against those it feared would be threats to its power.

The ISA has done tremendous damage to us, our families and the people of Singapore.

DR POH SOO KAI'S STATEMENT

Sixty years ago, on 2 February 1963, I was imprisoned without trial along with over a hundred others. I was then the Assistant Secretary General of the Barisan Sosialis. I am now 91 years old and am one of about 50 survivors of Operation Coldstore alive today. In 1963, most of us were in our youthful twenties.

The PAP government has been relentless in using the ISA, arresting and imprisoning people without trial.

Those of us who refused to sign "confessions" were imprisoned indefinitely, some for almost two decades. Dr Chia Thye Poh, then an elected Member of Parliament, was arrested at age 25 and imprisoned for 23 years; for nine more years he was forced to live with severe restrictions – three years confined to Sentosa Island and six years within the limits of Singapore.

Today, I demand accountability for myself and all political prisoners, so that Singaporeans can understand the roots of our draconian political system. The PAP has been the only ruling party in Singapore since 1959. Its younger members may not be fully aware of how their party managed to defeat its political opponents and critics so thoroughly. It is time they know the party's history.

On 19 September 2011, 16 ISA survivors signed a statement calling for the Singapore government to abolish the ISA when the Malaysian government announced that it would repeal their ISA.

The Ministry of Home Affairs responded that the signatories were involved in “subversive activities which posed a threat to national security” and that they were not detained for their political beliefs but were “actively involved in Communist United Front activities in support of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), which was committed to the violent overthrow of the constitutionally-elected governments in Singapore and Malaysia”.¹

I **CATEGORICALLY REJECT** such spurious and unsubstantiated allegations and fabricated charges. The PAP government has continued to repeat such lies for 60 years.

I **CHALLENGE** the PAP government to produce evidence to substantiate their allegations against me.

I **STRONGLY MAINTAIN** that I was arrested under Operation Coldstore because of my political beliefs, which were based on the anticolonial and pro-working-class manifesto and constitution of the PAP when it was formed. I was one of its founding members.

Operation Coldstore was about Lee Kuan Yew, the compliant successor of the British colonialists, needing to keep his position as prime minister.

An account of the key political events in the 1960s will bear this out.

The people of Singapore were anticolonial. They were against the Lim Yew Hock government for arresting innocent students and trade union leaders in 1956. I now know from de-classified archival documents that Lee Kuan Yew was secretly plotting those arrests with Lim Yew Hock to win over the British, who wanted to retain her military base in Singapore.

The PAP had a landslide victory in the 1959 general election. There was no political crisis or instability in the country in its initial years as government. Once in government, Lee collaborated with the British who pressed him to act against the left faction of the PAP led by Lim Chin Siong.

Instability emerged within the PAP itself when Lee expelled his rival Ong Eng Guan. Ong defended and retained his seat convincingly as an independent in the Hong Lim by-election of April 1961. He had campaigned on the platform of

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/33ck2ezv>

keeping the PAP government true to its election pledges, including freeing prisoners held without trial by Lim Yew Hock.

From the Hong Lim by-election, the British realised with alarm that the PAP was no longer the force it was when it came into power in June 1959, and that the electorate had a mind of its own.

In July 1961, the PAP lost the Anson by-election in the face of the same demand to free those imprisoned without trial. When the seat of Sembawang became vacant not long after, Lee (having lost two by-elections) did not dare to face another by-election.

The British threw Lee Kuan Yew a “lifeline”, as they put it. They gave Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman the merger deal of a Malaysia which included British North Borneo and Sarawak and which put Singapore’s internal security in the Tunku’s hand. Lee relentlessly called the PAP left “communists” and expelled them when they refused to give him complete control to decide on the terms for merger. The expelled PAP left-wing formed the Barisan Sosialis which was then the strongest political force in Singapore. But Operation Coldstore totally decimated them.

Operation Coldstore was ordered by the British, Singapore and Federation of Malaya members of the Internal Security Council to overcome the challenge from the Barisan Sosialis. Nine out of the 16 Central Working Committee members led by Lim Chin Siong were arrested and imprisoned. Their imprisonment eliminated the Barisan’s top echelon from the September 1963 general election, giving the PAP a clear win. Despite that, the government almost immediately ordered another wave of arrests, including of another three members of the Barisan Central Working Committee who were successful in the general election.

Separation took place less than two years after merger, and the ISA continued to be the instrument used to suppress political activities which were constitutional but which the government labelled “subversive”, without needing to provide evidence. I remained in prison at the pleasure of the PAP government even when Barisan’s objections to the terms of merger were shown to be valid.

After 60 years, the PAP government should go beyond just repeating unsubstantiated allegations. It should provide evidence to support the justifications they gave for launching Operation Coldstore.

The 2011 Ministry of Home Affairs' statement repeated the lies that Barisan Sosialis was ready to join forces with "groups resorting to violence and bloodshed as in the Brunei revolt" and that national defence and Singapore's security were jeopardised.

Nothing can be further from the truth. What Barisan Sosialis did was no more than issue a statement of moral support for the Brunei revolt of December 1962. It was a statement of solidarity with all colonies rising to overthrow colonial rule. As the PAP government well knew, Barisan Sosialis did not possess or supply any weapon to the Brunei People's Party led by A. M. Azahari who had won the election but was denied the right to govern Brunei.

The 2011 Ministry of Home Affairs statement also mentioned that one of the signatories had given medical aid to a CPM saboteur. While the person was not named officially, I believe it was a reference to me.

I was arrested for a second time in June 1976. A month earlier, the Dutch Labour Party had tabled a memorandum to expel the PAP at the Socialist International meeting. My speeches highlighting the prolonged imprisonment without trial in Singapore were cited.

However, no mention was made of the Socialist International memorandum as reasons for my arrest. Instead the government alleged that in December 1974 I had given medicine for an injured bomber who had intended to assassinate the managing director of the Nanyang Shoe Factory.

The person who came to my clinic made a televised "confession" that he had passed on medicines from me to his injured comrade. At the same time, the ISD said to me that their raid of my clinic showed that I had given him medication for his sore throat and that my records were in order. They were showing me that they were free to make false accusations and I was in no position to stop them.

Then in 1977, I was alleged to have also treated the other injured bomber hiding in Masai, Johor. My wife, a nurse was alleged to have accompanied me there.

This “Masai incident” was a total fabrication. I only found out about this alleged incident later. “Masai” was never mentioned in my prison interrogations.

I have categorically denied and rebutted these allegations for the last ten years and more. I have done this in my speeches and writings, and whenever the authorities repeated the lie.

Operation Coldstore carried out on 2 February 1963 was the start of the pernicious use of state power by the PAP government to imprison political opponents without trial and for as long as it chooses.

ON THIS THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION COLDSTORE, THE UNDERSIGNED FORMER ISA PRISONERS AND I ARE PUTTING ON RECORD THAT WE DEMAND:

- 1. The immediate abolition of the ISA;**
- 2. An apology from the PAP government to rectify the grievous crimes it had committed against us; and**
- 3. Compensation for us, former political prisoners and the families of those who are deceased.**

We ask this as a matter of right, as survivors of the most serious and baseless allegations which the PAP government has chosen to ignore.

Dated this 2 February 2023

Dr Poh Soo Kai 傅树介医生 (arrested on 02.02.1963, 04.06.1976)

Signatories

Name		Date of Arrest
1 Mavis Puthuchery wife of James Joseph Puthuchery	普都遮里	1956, 1963 ^
2 Otto Fong son of Fong Swee Suan	方水双	1956, 1963
3 Ng Beng Tee	黄明治	1956
4 Otto Fong son of Chan Lai Ying	陈丽英	1956
5 Tee Hong Seng	池方盛	1957
6 Tan Kok Fang	陈国防	1957, 1963

Name		Date of Arrest
7 Roesman bin Mohd Said son of Said Zahari	塞.查哈利	1963
8 Liew Lai See wife of Hoe Cheok Wah	何卓华	1963 #
9 Rose Tan wife of Tan Jing Quee	陈仁贵	1963, 1977
10 Lee Soon Huat	李顺发	1963
11 Wee Toon Lip	黄循立	1963
12 Iqbal Ghouse son of Salahuddin Ghouse	高式	1963
13 Chen Yutao wife of Kang Hoon Lim	江云林	1963
14 Haw Thar Heong	陶祚强	1963
15 Lee Tee Tong	李诗东/思东	1963
16 Michael Fernandez	费南德	1964, 1977
17 Lim Yew Beng	林耀明	1964
18 Chiew Kam Chow	赵甘照	1965
19 Tan Muihua	陈美和	1966
20 Chong Ming Kee	钟明记	1966
21 Tan Gim Joo	陈锦福	1966
22 Fu Yang Yeow	傅仰曜	1966
23 Lan Ah Lek	林亚礼	1966
24 Toh Ching Kee	卓清枝	1967
25 Liu Li Ying	刘丽英	1967
26 Tan Seng Lee	陈静坤	1969
27 Wee Bee Kwee	黄米贵	1970
28 Chng Min Oh @ Zhuang Ming Hu	庄明湖	1970
29 Tan Sin @ Tan Seng Hin	陈成兴	1970
30 Goh Peng Wah	吴平华	1970
31 Kee Ai Tee wife of Tan Kim Sew	陈金寿	1970
32 Chwa Seh Kea	蔡世居	1970
33 Sim Teong Hiok	沈仲叶	1970
34 Toh Siew Tin	卓秀珍	1970
35 Ngoh Teck Nam	伍德南	1974, 1977
36 Tan Suan Poh	陈川波	1974
37 Tan Gim Seng	陈锦新	1974
38 Oh Soon Loo	胡顺裕	1974
39 Ho Chin Huat	何进发	1975
40 Lee Wan Ning	李苑宁	1975
41 Ong Sooi Eng	王瑞荣	1975
42 Oh Teng Aik	胡丁海	1976
43 Teng Ah Boo	邓银岗	1976

Name		Date of Arrest
44 Tan Ping Wee	陈兴妮	1976
45 Chew Thiam Pow	周添宝	1976
46 Mok Kwong Yue	莫光裕	1977
47 Chua Chap Jee	蔡奕志	1977
48 Koh Kay Yew	许赓猷	1977
49 Pang Thu Sing	彭杜生	1977
50 Lim Pai	林沛	1979
51 Ting Moi King	陈妹金	1980
52 Vincent Cheng Kim Chuan	钟金全	1987
53 William Yap Hon Ngian	叶汉源	1987, 1988
54 Teo Soh Lung	张素兰	1987, 1988
55 Tan Tee Seng	陈智成	1987
56 Low Yit Leng	刘月玲	1987
57 Wong Souk Yee	黄淑仪	1987, 1988
58 Chng Suan Tze	庄瑄芝	1987, 1988
59 Tang Fong Har	陈凤霞	1987
60 Chew Kheng Chuan	周庆全	1987, 1988

^ Arrested in 1951 under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, 1948

Arrested in 1950 under the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, 1948