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## **Australia's death row plea to Singapore**

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**22 November, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Australia's death row plea to Singapore**

The Australian Government is in two minds about whether to take Singapore to the International Court of Justice in a last-ditch effort to save an Australian drug trafficker from the gallows. Death row inmate Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, is due to be hanged on December 2 for smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Repeated appeals to Singapore's government for clemency, including those from Prime Minister John Howard, have fallen on deaf ears. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman described the upcoming hanging as "repugnant" and said efforts to spare Nguyen's life had been given "short shrift" and treated with contempt. However, the spokesman also said Australia would not risk "trashing our relationship with Singapore" for Nguyen's sake.

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to death in March 2004. He said he became a drug mule to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend to cover his twin brother's legal fees for a drug offence three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer deems the UN Court of Justice to offer a glimmer of hope because it considers meting out the death sentence for heroin possession as illegal. A major obstacle to this is that Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not accept its jurisdiction. Further, the Australian Government must officially champion the case, as the court will only preside over applications brought by nation states. Although Mr. Howard described it as a "desperately sad case", he said he could not allow it to "contaminate our bilateral relationship with Singapore".

## WARM-UPS

**1. SINGAPORE SEARCH:** Find out as much information as you can on Singapore. Talk to many other students. After you have finished, sit with your partner(s) and exchange information. What did you find out that most surprised you? What did you hear that was very interesting?

**2. DEATH PENALTY METHODS:** In pairs / groups, talk about your opinion of the following ways of administering the death penalty:

- Hanging
- Beheading / guillotine
- Firing squad
- Stoning
- Lethal injection
- Electrocution (the electric chair)
- Gassing
- Other

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Australia / being in two minds / last-ditch efforts / drugs / traffickers / heroin / death row / hanging / contempt / glimmers of hope / obstacles / bilateral relations*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. DEATH ROW:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with death row. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

**5. SELFLESSNESS:** Would you do ANYTHING if your partner, parents, siblings, best friends... desperately needed your help? Would you risk your own life to save theirs? Which of the following would you do or not do to save someone you love?

- Smuggle heroin into Singapore
- Sell everything you own
- Take out a huge loan
- Rob a bank
- Sell photos of your body to a website
- Shoot someone
- Fight Mike Tyson
- Be a traitor to your country

**6. DRUGS OPINIONS:** Do you agree with these opinions on drugs and the death penalty? Talk about them with your partner(s).

- a. Anyone trafficking or selling drugs should be sentenced to death.
- b. There should be no distinction between hard and soft drugs. They are the same.
- c. One country cannot be allowed to execute a citizen of another country.
- d. All nations should sign an agreement banning the death penalty for drug crimes.
- e. Laws should be stricter because countries like Singapore are safe and crime-free.
- f. Drug traffickers assist in the deaths of many drug addicts and deserve to die.
- g. The death penalty is wrong for any crime.
- h. The leader of one country should have the power to stop its citizens being executed by another country.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Australia wants Singapore to overturn an Australian's death sentence. T / F
- b. An Australian is on death row for trafficking heroin into Singapore. T / F
- c. Australians have complained that Prime Minister John Howard is deaf. T / F
- d. A spokesman said Australia would risk everything to stop the hanging. T / F
- e. The man was helping his drug trafficking twin brother escape hanging. T / F
- f. The man's lawyer said a UN court would overturn the death sentence. T / F
- g. Singapore is not a signatory to the UN International Court of Justice. T / F
- h. Mr. Howard will not let the case contaminate relations with Singapore. T / F

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a. in two minds | compassion    |
| b. last-ditch   | considers     |
| c. clemency     | administer    |
| d. short shrift | eleventh-hour |
| e. repugnant    | sully         |
| f. drug mule    | no pity       |
| g. deems        | administering |
| h. meting out   | undecided     |
| i. preside      | trafficker    |
| j. contaminate  | abhorrent     |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. a last-ditch effort to         | Singapore's government for clemency |
| b. due to be                      | brought by nation states            |
| c. Repeated appeals to            | our relationship with Singapore     |
| d. efforts to spare Nguyen's life | glimmer of hope                     |
| e. not risk trashing              | had been given "short shrift"       |
| f. he became a drug mule          | save an Australian drug trafficker  |
| g. offer a                        | signatory to the court              |
| h. Singapore is not a             | relationship with Singapore         |
| i. preside over applications      | hanged on December 2                |
| j. contaminate our bilateral      | to pay back US\$15,000              |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

### Australia's death row plea to Singapore

The Australian Government is in two \_\_\_\_\_ about whether to take Singapore to the International Court of Justice in a last-ditch \_\_\_\_\_ to save an Australian drug trafficker from the \_\_\_\_\_. Death row inmate Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, is due to be hanged on December 2 for smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Repeated \_\_\_\_\_ to Singapore's government for clemency, including those from Prime Minister John Howard, have \_\_\_\_\_ on deaf ears. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman described the upcoming hanging as "\_\_\_\_\_ " and said efforts to spare Nguyen's life had been given "short shrift" and treated with \_\_\_\_\_. However, the spokesman also said Australia would not risk "trashing our relationship with Singapore" for Nguyen's \_\_\_\_\_.

*gallows*  
*sake*  
*effort*  
*repugnant*  
*appeals*  
*fallen*  
*minds*  
*contempt*

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to \_\_\_\_\_ in March 2004. He said he became a drug mule to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend to \_\_\_\_\_ his twin brother's legal fees for a drug offence three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer deems the UN Court of Justice to offer a \_\_\_\_\_ of hope because it considers meting out the death sentence for heroin \_\_\_\_\_ as illegal. A major obstacle to this is that Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not accept its \_\_\_\_\_. Further, the Australian Government must officially \_\_\_\_\_ the case, as the court will only preside over applications brought by nation states. Although Mr. Howard described it as a "\_\_\_\_\_ sad case", he said he could not allow it to "\_\_\_\_\_ our bilateral relationship with Singapore".

*desperately*  
*possession*  
*champion*  
*cover*  
*jurisdiction*  
*death*  
*contaminate*  
*glimmer*

## **LISTENING**

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### **Australia's death row plea to Singapore**

The Australian Government is \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ about whether to take Singapore to the International Court of Justice in a last-ditch effort to save an Australian drug trafficker from the \_\_\_\_\_. Death row inmate Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, is due to be \_\_\_\_\_ on December 2 for smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Repeated appeals to Singapore's government for clemency, including those from Prime Minister John Howard, have fallen on \_\_\_\_\_. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman described the upcoming hanging as "repugnant" and said efforts to \_\_\_\_\_ Nguyen's life had been given "short shrift" and treated with contempt. However, the spokesman also said Australia would not risk "trashing our relationship with Singapore" for Nguyen's \_\_\_\_\_.

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to death in March 2004. He said he became a drug \_\_\_\_\_ to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend to \_\_\_\_\_ his twin brother's legal \_\_\_\_\_ for a drug offence three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer deems the UN Court of Justice to offer a \_\_\_\_\_ of hope because it considers meting out the death sentence for heroin possession as illegal. A major \_\_\_\_\_ to this is that Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not accept its jurisdiction. Further, the Australian Government must officially \_\_\_\_\_ the case, as the court will only \_\_\_\_\_ over applications brought by nation states. Although Mr. Howard described it as a "desperately sad case", he said he could not allow it to "contaminate our \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with Singapore".

## **AFTER READING / LISTENING**

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'death'** and **'row'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "DRUGS" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about drugs, drug trafficking and the death penalty.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| • minds    | • mule        |
| • gallows  | • deems       |
| • repeated | • glimmer     |
| • fallen   | • obstacle    |
| • spare    | • champion    |
| • sake     | • desperately |

## **DISCUSSION**

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What is your image of Singapore?
- c. Do you think Mr. Nguyen's execution should go ahead?
- d. What punishments do you think should be applied for international drug smuggling?
- e. Do you think punishments should depend on the type and amount of the drugs trafficked?
- f. Do you think it's acceptable that Australia should ask another country to change its legal decisions to save a drug trafficker?
- g. Do you think Australia's Prime Minister should do more to save Mr. Nguyen?
- h. Are you surprised that a progressive country such as Singapore has the death penalty?
- i. Do you think Singapore is treating Australia with contempt?
- j. When was the last time you requested something that fell on deaf ears?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What are your feelings towards Mr. Nguyen?
- d. Do you think his twin brother should ask to be executed instead?
- e. Would you smuggle drugs if a partner, sibling or best friend desperately needed help?
- f. Do you think there should be special international laws for when one country wants to execute the citizen of another?
- g. Do you think this is a "desperately sad case" or a straightforward case of a drug smuggler deserving his punishment?
- h. Do you think airports should be more rigorous in searching people for drugs to deter smugglers?
- i. What advice would you give to Australian Prime Minister Howard and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee over this case?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## SPEAKING

### **DEATH ROW ROLE PLAY:** Should Mr. Nguyen be hanged?

Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role to develop your roles and discuss ideas and "strategies" before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

#### Role A – MR. NGUYEN

You are extremely sorry for your actions. You have never used drugs in your life. You smuggled drugs into Singapore only to help your brother, not yourself. You have no criminal record. You understand you committed a crime and are prepared to spend life in prison in Singapore.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD BE SHOWN MERCY.

#### Role B – SINGAPORE LAWYER

The law is the law. It cannot be changed for one person. If you change the decision to hang Mr. Nguyen, Singapore's legal system will be flooded with similar appeals. The whole world knows Singapore is very strict on drugs. Mr. Nguyen should have respected that. Singapore is a safe and clean country

THINK OF REASONS WHY SINGAPORE SHOULD STICK WITH THE HANGING.

#### Role C – AUSTRALIAN SPOKESPERSON

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. You are outraged countries still use capital punishment. It is barbaric. Your Prime Minister has appealed directly to Singapore's Prime Minister. That should be enough to save Mr. Nguyen and ensure good bilateral relations. Mr. Nguyen can stay in an Australian prison.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MR. NGUYEN SHOULD BE SPARED.

#### Role D – REFORMED HEROIN ADDICT

Your life was nearly destroyed because you were a heroin addict. You lived in hell for many years. You lost your family and friends. You stole money from your parents. You hate anyone who tries to smuggle drugs. You know the drugs will destroy many lives. You think Mr. Nguyen should definitely be hanged to send a strong message to other would-be smugglers.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MR. NGUYEN SHOULD BE HANGED.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

Discuss what should happen to Mr. Nguyen.

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on the case mentioned in the article. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. DRUG PENALTIES:** Create a poster outlining your ideas for the different punishments that should be handed out for different drug offences. Are the punishments different for the type and amount of drugs and nationality of the smuggler? Explain what you wrote to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

**4. DIARY / JOURNAL:** Imagine you are Mr. Nguyen. Write your diary / journal entry for a day spent on death row. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. T      c. F      d. F      e. F      f. F      g. T      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a. in two minds | undecided     |
| b. last-ditch   | eleventh-hour |
| c. clemency     | compassion    |
| d. short shrift | no pity       |
| e. repugnant    | abhorrent     |
| f. drug mule    | trafficker    |
| g. deems        | considers     |
| h. meting out   | administering |
| i. preside      | administer    |
| j. contaminate  | sully         |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. a last-ditch effort to         | save an Australian drug trafficker  |
| b. due to be                      | hanged on December 2                |
| c. Repeated appeals to            | Singapore's government for clemency |
| d. efforts to spare Nguyen's life | had been given "short shrift"       |
| e. not risk trashing              | our relationship with Singapore     |
| f. he became a drug mule          | to pay back US\$15,000              |
| g. offer a                        | glimmer of hope                     |
| h. Singapore is not a             | signatory to the court              |
| i. preside over applications      | brought by nation states            |
| j. contaminate our bilateral      | relationship with Singapore         |

### GAP FILL:

#### Australia's death row plea to Singapore

The Australian Government is in two **minds** about whether to take Singapore to the International Court of Justice in a last-ditch **effort** to save an Australian drug trafficker from the **gallows**. Death row inmate Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, is due to be hanged on December 2 for smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Repeated **appeals** to Singapore's government for clemency, including those from Prime Minister John Howard, have **fallen** on deaf ears. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman described the upcoming hanging as "**repugnant**" and said efforts to spare Nguyen's life had been given "short shrift" and treated with **contempt**. However, the spokesman also said Australia would not risk "trashing our relationship with Singapore" for Nguyen's **sake**.

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to **death** in March 2004. He said he became a drug mule to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend to **cover** his twin brother's legal fees for a drug offence three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer deems the UN Court of Justice to offer a **glimmer** of hope because it considers meting out the death sentence for heroin **possession** as illegal. A major obstacle to this is that Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not accept its **jurisdiction**. Further, the Australian Government must officially **champion** the case, as the court will only preside over applications brought by nation states. Although Mr. Howard described it as a "**desperately** sad case", he said he could not allow it to "**contaminate** our bilateral relationship with Singapore".