

Response to NMP Faizah Jamal:

I thank the Member for her comments. I think I'll emphasise again some points I made earlier. We have this legislation – death penalty as well as mandatory death penalty – in the legislation because we believe that it is necessary in the interests of society. If we believed otherwise, we will seek to change it. And we are always considering it, shown by the fact that we have been reviewing it fairly consistently. DPM Teo mentioned that we have reviewed it for a very long time, but the most recent was in '06 (which lasted a year), '09, and then again in December 2010 we started studies, and then conducted a full review in July 2011 based on the studies. So we ourselves are constantly aware of the need to look at this legislation and see how it impacts, in the context of the factors I explained just now – the external environment, society, and the protection of society – how we can do this.

I think if we focus on any one individual, a powerful case can emotionally be made out for saving a life. For saving lives, powerful cases can always be made out. It is more difficult if you want to balance that against the reality. 15g of heroin is 300 people using that for a week. Somebody who peddles that, and usually they peddle much more than that, will bring ruin, possibly death, or at least a life of ruin, to a large number of people. Let's say instead of 15g it is 100g, you work it out for yourself, how many thousands of people.

What is never in the headlines is the number of lives that have been lost, the number of children who are orphaned either literally or through their parents being in jail, the amount of sadness and impact on the social fabric of society that those who are on the ground see everyday. The headlines never focus on the victims of crime. If you look at it – the number of people who are impacted and how tough you need to be to try and save the society as a whole, then you need to send out a clear and consistent message. And the clear and consistent message is that if you deal in drugs in a quantity that is enough to support 300 people or more, then you face the death penalty. That's been the message we have been giving. So I think that those are aspects that we do need to consider. Supposing we don't need to think of society, we don't need to think of the victims, we don't need to think of the young children, we don't need to think of all the wives and daughters that are going to be impacted, we only need to think of the courier, then I agree with your point. But if you believe that it is right also to think of these people, and that it is right for Singapore not to become like some other cities, where you can't walk on the streets, and where needle exchange centres are now a reality, then I think you need to think of these things.

So it is never an easy debate. It is not because we like the death penalty, it is not because we think it ought to be imposed for no reason, it is not because we want to simply be tough. It is imposed with the duty of ensuring the safety and security of every single Singaporean who goes out on the streets. We feel there is no choice but

to have this framework. And that is a conversation that we should continue to have.
Thank you.