Weighing the death penalty

By Ann Ho

TO COMPARE racist drug trafficking to the grotesque vandalism that occurred at the Christmas of 2003, a total of 113 of our citizens were hanged for drug crimes. Among them was Ngau Yow Tung, whom we will call “Siu” in this story, a drug dealer in Singapore.

Siu and 112 others were sentenced to death in Singapore in December 2003, the Australian Civil Liberties Union was vilified in the local press for its initiative to stop the death penalty. As a result, Siu and his fellow death warrants was later rescinded.

Some activists groups are now fighting for Siu’s release fighting the Australian branch of Amnesty International, whose opposition to the death penalty is well known. Local ngo’s “The Centre for Crime prevention” the group that fights for the death penalty is an independent ngo. It was founded by Siu in 2005.

However, Siu, Mr Surya says, was an active coordinator of capital punishment for all crimes, however, no evidence or reason, because, to him, the death penalty was not a symbol of “intemperate punishment”.

Siu has further explained their opposition to the death penalty, mostly onovable and unanswerable. For one, it is an abstract belief. You either believe in it or not. I disagree. Professor Michael Charles, head of the National University of Singapore (NUS) law school, however, has a view on the death penalty.

He says, while an individual may be killed to defend one’s own life when threatened by an assailant, there is no comparable threat when the public is not under threat. Therefore, he says, capital punishment should be abolished because it is an unjustified threat.

There are moral intuitions, however, reasonable people disagree about its desirability. It will depend on the issue of criminal responsibility. Some people want to see the death penalty as a form of punishment. Others believe the justice system should focus on rehabilitation. The next question is: What is the role of the death penalty?

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