

The President
Nanyang Technological University

29 April 2013

Dear President,

Re: The Case of Our Colleague Cherian George

We the undersigned are saddened to learn that the President has rejected the appeal of our colleague Cherian George regarding the denial of his tenure. We believe this decision will have major negative repercussions on the School first and then the University as well.

Notwithstanding his focus on Singapore journalism, that he is recognised both locally and internationally may be evidenced by the response when news first broke of the denial of his tenure in this round. How many of us, including those who voted against his tenure, would, if their tenure were denied, garner similar support from the international academic community, the student bodies of our University as well as that of our cross-town rival, and at least 100 Singapore public intellectuals?

Both the two former deans, Emeritus Professor Eddie Kuo and Professor Ang Peng Hwa, are of the view that Cherian has been one of the most valuable additions to the School in teaching, research and service. He has launched some of the most innovative programmes that have brought fame and funds to the School. The very idea of naming School after the most beloved President of Singapore – Dr Wee Kim Wee— was an idea from Cherian. Having WAN-IFRA's Newsplex Asia sited at the School, the opening of which the President and Provost graced, was also his doing. Thanks to this tie-up, the facility attracts more than 100 media professionals a year to the School for talks, short courses and workshops and this leads to many spin-offs such as industry collaboration and internships for our students. The GO-FAR (Going Overseas For Advanced Reporting), which is touted by the School and University in recruiting undergraduates, was Cherian's brainchild. It is a programme that other leading universities point to as worthy of emulation.

Similarly, the Asian Journalism Fellowship programme from Temasek Foundation was designed by Cherian. It attracts mid-level journalists from throughout Asia who have gone on to become editors. Singapore Ministers appear to be aware of the value of such a programme because they regularly accept the invitations to speak to the fellows. Temasek Foundation itself speaks highly of the AJF programme.

Both GO-FAR and AJF programmes are also financially sound; they have been receiving strong donor support and enjoy a matching grant from the Government.

It is against this backdrop that we are perplexed as to what exactly NTU expects of its staff in order to earn tenure. Those of us who are not yet tenured need to know: what more than Cherian do we have to do? Those of us who are counselors to younger staff need to explain in clear and precise terms what Cherian has failed to achieve so they may do better when their turn comes. Those of us who have helped build the School's reputation, and indeed NTU's integrity, need to respond to the numerous critics with unimpeachable reasons why their suspicions are misplaced. The controversy that Cherian's case has generated is unprecedented in the School's history and one that is causing serious damage to our academic reputation and professional integrity. It also has serious repercussions on NTU's ability to attract top communications scholars, coming at a time especially when the School has 10 faculty vacancies to fill.

Without passing any judgment on NTU's Management, we feel it is important to share our concern about the very serious and adverse consequences of such a decision. If the decision is widely seen as unfair and unjustified, first the School, and then the University, will surely suffer in attracting good students, good scholars and good benefactors. NTU's international ranking will then take a knock. It will be a regrettable legacy.

Yours Sincerely,



Emeritus Professor Eddie Kuo



Professor Ang Peng Hwa



Professor Hao Xiaoming



Professor Schubert Foo

cc. Pravarot

cc Chair, WkWSCL