

8 March 2013

Mr Koh Boon Hwee, Chair, Board of Trustees, NTU
Professor Haresh Shah, Chair, Academic Advisory Committee, NTU
Professor Bertil Andersson, President, NTU
Professor Freddy Boey, Deputy President and Provost, NTU

Re: Support for A/P Cherian George

Dear gentlemen,

I write this letter in support of the appeal by Associate Professor Cherian George against the decision to deny him tenure for a second time. That the rejections of his tenure applications were due to interference from outside the university is beyond serious rebuttal. The truth of this assertion can be easily deduced from the publicly available facts, but is also known to me through my own experience of PT4 as then-Dean of the College of Science and member of the University Promotion and Tenure Review Committee.

It was therefore highly disturbing to read the University's press release of 26 February 2013, in the context of A/P George's case, stating that NTU's tenure review process is, "purely a peer-driven academic exercise". This is false. A purely peer-driven exercise is not what has led to the denial of tenure to A/P George. It is rather the result of an imposition originating outside the University.

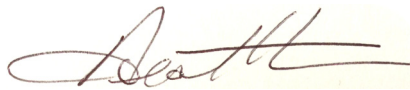
I came to Singapore of my own free will to pursue personal and professional ambitions, not to challenge the Singaporean "way". I therefore do not claim any right to insist that Singapore alter itself to suit my preferences. I do insist, however, that publicly professed allegiance to certain values must be met with transparent adherence to those values. It is for this reason that I cannot accept that a scholar should be secretly punished for working to the highest professional and ethical standards of his discipline and in accordance with the espoused ideals of his university. I likewise cannot accept that NTU should publicly proclaim that it is upholding one set of principles while covertly applying, or acquiescing to, another.

I would ask the University leadership to consider the broader context of this issue. At some point, perhaps not so far in the future, history will judge how each of us has acted in this situation. It will ask why the people who could have, and should have, stood up for the principles

espoused by NTU and by academics everywhere did not do so. I might bring to mind recent events in the US. When a dismal chapter in Penn State's history came to light in 2011, those leaders who had remained quiet when they should have spoken out against injustice were greeted with general disdain. They will forever be remembered as individuals who brought dishonour to their institution. This does not have to be our fate. If, in fact, it is beyond the University's powers to grant tenure to Associate Professor George, then at least our leaders can make it publicly known that he has met the University's criteria for tenure, but that NTU's hands are tied. This would be a sad but truthful outcome.

In closing, I submit that the University has only two ethically acceptable options: either grant tenure to Associate Professor George, or publicly acknowledge that the decision to deny him tenure has been imposed from the outside. I strongly urge you to take one of these courses of action. To do otherwise would be to shame the University in the very global arena in which we strive to hold our heads high.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mark Featherstone', is written in black ink on a light yellow rectangular background.

Professor Mark Featherstone
School of Biological Sciences
Nanyang Technological University

Cc:

Professor Alexander Zehnder, Board of Trustees, NTU
Professor Lam Khin Yong, Chief of Staff, President's Office, NTU
Professor Stephen Smith, Vice-President (Research), NTU
Professor Angela Goh, Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs), NTU
Professor Alan Chan, Dean, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, NTU
Professor Ling San, Dean, College of Science, NTU
Professor Gillian Yeo, Dean, Nanyang Business School, NTU
Professor Janie Fouke, Dean, College of Engineering, NTU
Professor Dermot Kelleher, Dean, Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, Imperial/NTU
Associate Professor Benjamin Detenber, Chair, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication, NTU
Associate Professor Leong Weng Kee, Chair, Senate, NTU
Professor Peter Preiser, Chair, School of Biological Sciences, NTU