

## **Law Ministry actively looking at harassment laws in S'pore**

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***Kimberly Spykerman***

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Law Minister K Shanmugam said this at a dialogue during a conference on civil society on Monday, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Mr Shanmugam said it is the government's role to provide a framework where people can handle debates themselves.

But given the proliferation of views online, they have to find alternate solutions rather than always turning to the law.

"If it's possible, say for example, somebody who feels he or she has been harassed, feels they don't need to sue or can just have a correction put out, maybe that's an easier solution, rather than spending time, money in courts," he said.

Mr Shanmugam added: "We have faced tremendous pressure from the public to update our harassment laws, to deal with online harassment. We are behind the curve, if you look at other jurisdictions - US, UK, Australia, New Zealand - we are well behind the curve in terms of putting in laws. My ministry is looking at it actively."

He added that this has to be looked at together with other forms of harassment that include workplace harassment and sexual harassment.

Mr Shanmugam also addressed concerns about the quality of engagement between government and civil society, noting that by and large it is a relationship that is working quite well. He said Singapore cannot be governed without the active participation of people and civil society in today's modern and complex economic and civil situation.

The government's work with animal welfare groups is one example of this.

Mr Shanmugam said: "If you ask them today, look at what was accomplished in the last two years. At their suggestion, the government formed the animal welfare law reform group - they came up with fairly revolutionary set of suggestions, very, very substantive suggestions. The government accepted all of them this year."

He also cited the major changes to the Criminal Procedure Code, and said that every single change involved consultation with the Bar.

Mr Shanmugam also put together a team from the Home Affairs Ministry, Law Ministry, and other agencies, the universities, and the Bar.

He also tackled questions about values-based education, and whether there are gaps in help being given to those who need it, among other topics.