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Singapore teen blogger jailed over 'insulting words'

A Singapore court has handed a jail sentence to a teenage blogger for the second time over his critical postings about religion. The case has reignited concerns about censorship and drawn criticism from rights groups.

Dw.com (29.09.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2dUq7rr> - The Singapore judge sentenced 17-year-old Amos Yee to six weeks in jail Thursday for "wounding religious feelings" after the teen pleaded guilty to six charges of deliberately posting comments critical of both Christianity and Islam.

Judge Ong Hian Sun told the district court that Yee had "deliberately elected to do harm by using offensive and insulting words and profane gestures" to hurt the feelings of Muslims and Christians, which could lead to discord between the races.

It was the second time Yee's written words have landed him in the docket.

An expletive-rich rant against Singapore's founding prime minister in March 2015 triggered a massive response in the Asian city-state. He was jailed over the video and ended up serving 50 days over added penalties and violating bail conditions.

His latest month-long trial was attended by officials of the UN Human Rights Council and the European Union, and was also closely watched by rights groups which see the case as a test on the limits of free speech in the country.

Phil Robertson, Asia deputy director of Human Rights Watch, said in a statement Thursday that the trial has only served to bring the blogger's off-color rants to a larger audience and that "by prosecuting Amos Yee for his comments, no matter how outrageous they may have been, Singapore has unfortunately doubled down on a strategy that clearly violates freedom of expression."

Singapore, which suffered inter-religious strife in the 1960s, closely guards ethnic harmony and prosecutes people seen to be inciting religious and racial strife. About 74 percent of its 3.9 million citizens and permanent residents are ethnic Chinese, with Malay Muslims and Indians forming the largest minorities.

After his sentencing, Yee told reporters that his case showed that "you can be sent to jail for criticizing Islam in Singapore even if you're a kid." He's due to surrender himself to jail authorities on October 13. He was also fined about \$1,500 (1300 euros).
