Innocence Project a ‘safety net’ in justice system

SINGAPORE – A group of National University of Singapore (NUS) law students have launched a project to provide recourse for individuals who believe they have been wrongfully convicted of crimes.

Called the Innocence Project, which students say is the first of its kind here, it is based on the view that even in the best of criminal justice systems, error cannot be completely ruled out.

The project is a collaborative effort between the NUS Criminal Justice Club, the Law Society of Singapore and the Association of Criminal Lawyers of Singapore (ACLS).

It is limited to applicants who claim to be factually innocent of the crime for which they have been convicted, have exhausted all avenues of appeal open to them and have served or are currently serving a prison sentence.

Student members of the project, in consultation with Professor Michael Hor and Assistant Professor Cheah Wui Ling, will make a preliminary assessment on the merit of applications. Where approval is granted by faculty advisers, the applications will be brought to lawyers from the Law Society of Singapore and the ACLS.

Further discussion on the merits of each application will take place between lawyers and the students, following which lawyers may take on the case in a pro-bono capacity.

Students say the project is positioned as a “safety net” to the criminal justice system, and aims to complement the existing criminal justice process. By assessing claims of wrongful conviction on their merits, in consultation with experienced law professors and criminal law practitioners, the project will increase public confidence in the criminal justice process. The project will also serve a role in promoting student interest in the practice of criminal law.