

# Malaysia Day Statement

**Malaysia Day Statement  
16 September 2014**

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) wishes Malaysia a happy 51st birthday. We are saddened, however, that the exercise of nation-building and our collective sense of nationhood are not yet truly reflective of the diversity of our people.

The heavy-handed crackdown by the authorities through the Sedition Act is only the latest example of the ways with which voices are silenced when they become inconvenient to those in power. We have seen other tactics before, from formal controls such as the now-repealed Internal Security Act to informal controls such as the funding of extremist ethno-nationalist groups to shout down human rights defenders.

The right to freedom of expression is more than just about free speech. It is about our ability as citizens to participate in the governance of this nation and the shaping of its history, so that they are truly representative of us. These repressive laws and electoral irregularities reinforce existing barriers for marginalised people who are already finding it difficult to make their voices count: women, the Orang Asal, Sabahans, Sarawakians, the urban poor, and people of diverse sexualities and genders.

That their voices disrupt the status quo has often been perceived as a threat. EMPOWER believes, however, that they are a necessary check and balance against tyranny. A country where popular discourse is dictated by and serves the interest of a limited group of people is not a democracy, it is an oligarchy.

EMPOWER's work has brought the organisation in contact with some of Malaysia's most marginalised citizens, including women among the urban poor, the homeless community, and indigenous communities in Peninsular Malaysia. Deprivation is not the only thing that characterises these communities. In all of our interactions with them, we see repeatedly evidence of great strength and a keen interest in determining the society they want to live in.

They are often dismissed as “uneducated” or “ignorant” of what they “should want”, and thus unable to make decisions for their own good. EMPOWER strongly rejects this. Instead, what is necessary is more inclusive and open systems of governance that does justice to their capacity for participation.

EMPOWER hopes Malaysia will one day achieve equality and sustain a thriving democracy that respects diversity for all. We have already seen the beginnings of such possibilities now – what remains is to dismantle all barriers in their way.