

Revoke Diplomatic Immunity for Sexual Assault

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Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) is horrified at the breakdown in leadership and accountability within the Malaysian Government over a diplomat charged with sexual assault and burglary.

The behaviour shown by the Malaysian Government has been appalling at every step of the process. Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman initially claimed that the Malaysian Government had been willing to waive diplomatic immunity for the accused during negotiations with New Zealand, and that the New Zealand Government “offered an alternative for the accused to be brought back to Malaysia.”

Statements by New Zealand Prime Minister John Key and the subsequent release of letters between the two governments proved otherwise. It was clear that the New Zealand government wanted Muhammad Rizalman Ismail to be tried in an open court, in New Zealand. Not only did the Malaysian government refuse to waive diplomatic immunity for the accused, it had written to the New Zealand Government asking for all charges against the accused be withdrawn and all documents pertaining to the case be sealed.

This is unacceptable, regardless of any “ambiguity” in the negotiation process between the two governments. Does the Malaysian Government perceive sexual assault to be a petty offence that can be waved away?

A Board of Inquiry is not appropriate for serious crimes of this nature. Muhammad Rizalman Ismail was not accused of mere misconduct or disciplinary problems, he was accused of the crimes of sexual assault and burglary. EMPOWER wants to emphasise that he was already charged in court before the Malaysian government asserted diplomatic immunity and whisked him back to Malaysia.

EMPOWER also wishes to extend our sympathies to the victim of the assault. We stand in solidarity with her, as we do with survivors of sexual assault in Malaysia for whom justice has been elusive. We remind the Malaysian government that rape and other forms of sexual assault remain a serious concern, especially in the wake of recent gangrapes. The Malaysian police refuse to publicly release statistics on rape, but the numbers are available for all within the Government to see.

Our call to Prime Minister Dato’ Sri Najib Tun Razak and the Malaysian Government is simple: do the right thing. Extradite Muhammad Rizalman Ismail to New Zealand and let the justice system take its course.