

Protect Human Rights Defenders in Malaysia

Joint Media Statement, 28 January 2014

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We, the undersigned, are disturbed and concerned by the escalating attacks against human rights defenders in Malaysia. Only last week, as reported on 25 January 2014, Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi threatened to take action against “separatists.” He further claimed that the Registrar of Society had declared the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the UPR Process (COMANGO) illegal even though it was the Secretary-General of the Home Ministry, with no statutory powers over the legal status of organisations, who released a statement. A day later, *Utusan Malaysia* called for action against a fictional mascot of a group of lawyers and commentators for simply affirming that the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the land.

Yesterday, on 27 January, a large contingent of police personnel delivered subpoenas to the homes of two individuals connected to Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia (SAMM): Propaganda Director Edy Noor Reduan and founder Badrul Hisham Shaharin. Reportedly, three police cars and approximately 10 police officers delivered the document at each location. We note that neither individual were criminal masterminds guarded by cadres of thugs. They were to answer charges under section 9(5) of the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012, read together with section 34 of the Penal Code, over the allegation that they organized the “Turun” rally on New Year’s Eve. The excessive numbers of police officers were clearly an attempt at intimidation.

These are not isolated incidents. We are seeing a pattern of attacks using religion, the monarchy, and patriotism as justifications to silence dissent, by both State and non-State actors. The emergence of well-funded extremist organisations such as PERKASA, MUPRO and ISMA signal a new phase of using non-State actors to do the dirty work of the State. This is borne out by the revelation that PERKASA was funded by the government, and the readiness of government bodies such as JAKIM to echo the accusations made by MUPRO and ISMA against COMANGO. They have very successfully used unfounded allegations, such as the untrue accusation that COMANGO supported same-sex marriage, to dilute the solidarity of civil society and concerned Malaysians.

We are at a turning point in history. Despite much-publicised reforms including the abolishment of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Emergency Ordinance (EO), repressive provisions such as detention without trial were restored in subsequent legislation. The Peaceful Assembly Act and Section 114A of the Evidence Act further shrunk what once seemed to be the opening of democratic spaces in the country after the end of the Mahathir era. We are concerned that Malaysia is regressing beyond the point of no return.

We call for the government of Malaysia to fulfill its obligation to respect, protect and promote the human rights of all in Malaysia. The government must do its duty by ending the attacks and removing the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. It should aim not to resort to

intimidation and fear tactics, but to engage with NGOs to work towards building democratic governance, moderation and tolerance.

Released by:

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)

Endorsed by:

1. All-Women's Action Society (AWAM)
2. Association of Women Lawyers
3. Civil Rights Committee – KLSCAH
4. Community Action Network (CAN)
5. Community Development Centre (CDC)
6. Damn The Dams
7. Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT)
8. Kelab Bangsar Utama
9. LLG Cultural Development Centre
10. Malaysia Youth & Students Democratic Movement (DEMA)
11. Malaysians for Beng Hock
12. Northern Green Youth
13. Parti Sosialis Malaysia
14. Peoples' Green Coalition
15. Perak Women for Women (PWW)
16. Persatuan Alumni PBTUSM Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
17. Persatuan Masyarakat Selangor & Wilayah Persekutuan (PERMAS)
18. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita, Selangor (PSWS)
19. Pusat Komang
20. Research for Social Advancement (REFSA)
21. Sembang-Sembang Forum
22. Sisters in Islam (SIS)
23. Solidarity for Civil Rights in China (SCRC)
24. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
25. Tenaganita
26. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)