

Joint Merdeka Statement

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31 August 2014

Selamat Hari Merdeka!

On this Merdeka Day, we as civil society organisations are disappointed that, a woman candidate who commands the majority support of the State Assembly, has yet to be named as the Menteri Besar of Selangor.

A Menteri Besar must have the support of the majority of the members of the State Assembly – this was affirmed in the Federal Court’s ruling in *Dato’ Seri Ir Hj. Mohammad Nizar Bin Jamaluddin v. Dato’ Dr. Zambry Bin Abd. Kadir*, related to the 2009 Perak crisis.

Presently, the only current Menteri Besar candidate who commands majority support from the Selangor State Assembly is Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

Therefore, should a candidate who does not enjoy majority support be appointed as Menteri Besar, where does this leave the State Assembly? Indeed, this would undermine the democratic processes underpinning the State Assembly and the governance of Selangor.

We are concerned, as well, at the message the Sultan of Selangor’s decree, for two names from each Pakatan Rakyat component party, may be sending to the public. In the context of an acute shortfall of women in decision-making positions nationwide, it reinforces public perception that any woman’s aspiration for public office is completely out of the ordinary despite the fact that the state constitution itself is gender-neutral.

Women who choose to enter politics often face sexist double standards and are held accountable to higher standards. They frequently face demands to prove themselves over and above the norm. On the other hand, male counterparts with similar levels of experience go unquestioned and their qualifications are assumed.

We are also disturbed by the rise in the use of the Sedition Act to silence criticism, correlating with the trend in authorities overstepping their limits over the past few years. In 2012, Prime Minister Dato’ Sri Najib Tun Razak promised that the Sedition Act will be repealed. However, SUARAM’s statistics show that the number of investigations and charges under the Sedition Act actually rose dramatically in 2013: 15 cases compared to 7 in 2012.

At a time when public authorities, governments, and political parties are breaking principles of good governance, we seem to be more powerless than ever at ensuring that they be held accountable for their actions. This stifling of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information has had terrible consequences on our ability as a society to engage with differences constructively and make informed choices in our lives.

Today, Peninsular Malaysia celebrates its 57th Independence Day and Sabah its 51st. One must ask, however, how much more will it take before we become a truly functional democracy that respects the rights of its citizens? While we look forward to 16th September, when we can truly celebrate as one federation, we are no less troubled by this question.

Released by:

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)

Endorsed by:

All Women's Action Society (AWAM)

Perak Women for Women (PWW)

Sisters in Islam (SIS)