

Joint Statement: Free Speech, Not Hate Speech

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Joint Media Statement, 7 February 2014

We, the undersigned, are troubled by the inaction of the police as they have taken no apparent action against the threats to the safety of Ms Teresa Kok, the Member of Parliament for Seputeh.

While we support the freedom of expression and right of every person to peacefully assemble, a line is crossed when there is a call to violence against another person exercising her freedom of expression.

The action taken by the representatives of Council of Islamic NGOs in offering a reward of RM1200 to the person who manages to slap Ms Kok is nothing short of criminal intimidation. This is an offence S503 of the Penal Code with a maximum punishment of 2 years imprisonment and/or a fine.

If a person does slap Ms Kok thereby committing the offence of causing hurt under S321 of the Penal Code, representatives of the Council of Islamic NGOs are also abettors. Under S109 of the Penal Code, they are liable to be imprisoned for 1 year and / or fined a maximum of RM2000.

A second act of criminal intimidation was committed when the representatives of the Council of Islamic NGOs slaughtered chickens and then smeared their blood on a banner with Ms Kok's image and those of other opposition leaders to hark back to the May 13 riots.

The call to slap Ms Kok by the Council of Islamic NGOs is also an example of violence against women. Ms Kok was the only woman in their banner and only she was threatened with a slap.

Gender based violence is a form of discrimination against women as it hinders women's full participation in all aspects of their lives. In Ms Kok's case, it is another obstacle in her pursuit of a political life. Malaysia continues to fall in the Global Gender Gap Index: from 72 in 2006 to 102 in 2013. This is largely due to a low score in the political empowerment of women. The failure of the government in ensuring a safe space and an enabling environment for women in the political arena will ensure that we keep sliding in the Global Gender Gap Index.

On 20 March 2014, Malaysia's universal periodic review (UPR) report will be adopted by the UN Human Rights Council. The government's failure to promote, protect and fulfil women's right to non-discrimination and the enjoyment of equality will surely be mentioned by NGOs when we address the UN Human Rights Council.

Endorsed by:

1. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
2. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
3. Pusat KOMAS
4. Malaysian Physicians for Social Responsibility
5. Persatuan Masyarakat Selangor dan Wilayah Persekutuan (PERMAS)
6. Community Action Network (CAN)
7. Coalition of Malaysian Indians NGOs
8. Group of Concerned Citizens
9. Academy of Tamil Studies
10. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)
11. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
12. Himpunan Hijau
13. Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)
14. Social-Economic Committee of KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (SEC-KLSCAH)
15. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita, Selangor (PSWS)
16. Sisters in Islam (SIS)
17. Knowledge and Rights with Young people through Safer Spaces (KRYSS)
18. Civil Rights Committee – KLSCAH
19. Persatuan Alumni PBTUSM KL & Selangor
20. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
21. Malaysians for Beng Hock
22. Amnesty International Malaysia
23. Damn The Dams
24. Peoples' Green Coalition
25. Sembang-sembarang Forum