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Call for public hearing on NGOs' role

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang said today any study on the role of non-governmental organisations should be conducted, in part at least, in the form of public hearings.

He said this was to enable the whole nation to be involved in a public debate.

Lim, who is also MP for Tanjung, said in a statement that the study on the role of NGOs should be broadened to involve not just the Government but also representatives of the NGOs.

Lim said the study, as suggested by Deputy Home Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid on Sunday, should be expanded to consider how NGOs in the country could be encouraged and fostered to promote the growth of a strong civil society.

Lim said the Government should fully recognise that it should not try to control NGOs or classify NGOs into "good" and "bad" ones on the basis of whether they agreed or disagreed with the Government.

He said if the Government wanted to introduce laws to bring all NGOs under the ambit of the Registrar of Societies, then the Societies Act should be amended to facilitate the easy registration and functioning of NGOs.

Lim also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Saturday that local NGOs did not seem to protest against police brutality in foreign countries, was "unfair" as no one had suggested that police brutality or abuses of power were only to be found in Malaysia.

"Police brutality and abuses of power, whether in the United States, Britain, Indonesia or Malaysia must all be equally condemned not only as an infringement of basic human rights, but as an intolerable act of lawlessness by forces whose first paramount duty is to uphold law and order," he said.

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