

16/08/1997

Call to review only certain clauses

Sufi Yusoff

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Participants at a roundtable forum on the United Nations Human Rights Declaration 1948 today concluded that any call to review the declaration must be made to specific clauses.

Changes can only be made through an international covenant, forum chairman Tan Sri Harun Hashim said.

He said it was important that weaknesses or problems in the charter are identified prior to the changes.

"You cannot change a declaration that was made 49 years ago," he said. "Any changes should be made through the covenants."

In the history of the declaration, Harun said there had been two covenants made to the declaration.

He said this at the end of the forum jointly organised by the Communications Department, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the Policy Research Institute and the Information Department.

Harun said a report would be compiled based on the forum's findings and submitted to the authorities for consideration.

The issue of the UN Human Rights Declaration came to light following a call for a review by Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin last month.

This was supported by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

During the Asean Post-Ministerial Conference last month, this call was also supported by Indonesia, the Philippines and China.

The forum was participated by 12 academicians and social activists including Professor Dr Syed Hussin Alattas, Dr Syed Husin Ali and Abdul Rahman Adnan, director of the Policy Research Institute.

Syed Hussin Alattas said without identifying specific problems, it would be hard to justify calls for a review.

"I agree with the need to review in order to improve the declaration," he said, "but we have to be specific and understand its cause."

Rahman said the declaration lacked input from non-western leaders, especially religious leaders in Asia.

Non-Western developing countries were quite defensive when it came to human rights while the West were more aggressive and considered themselves proponents of the cause, he said.

Syed Husin Ali, meanwhile, supported the call for a review on the basis that some Western countries used human rights as a political tool.

"However, Malaysia should also improve its own human rights record," he said.

(END)