

02 SEP 1999

Council-Guidelines

COUNCIL APPEALS TO PM TO WITHDRAW GUIDELINES FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) has appealed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to withdraw the latest Guidelines for Planning Places of Worship for Non-Muslims.

The council in a memorandum dated Aug 30, rejected in toto the guidelines, which it claimed, as unconstitutional, unconscionable and unacceptable.

"The so-called guidelines show a clear lack of understanding, sensitivity and respect for non-Islamic religions," said the MCCBCHS.

The guidelines dated Sept 1998 were distributed to the council on April 22 by Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government Datuk Peter Chin.

The council resented among others the guidelines by the National Fatwa Council contained in the latest guidelines which stated that permission to erect a house of worship may be granted if the land site is in a non-Muslim majority area and all applications for the building should be referred to the respective State Islamic Council for its views.

The MCCBCHS proposed to the government to commence a national campaign to educate all Malaysians in their respective religions and in each other's religion, as a long term effort to promote greater understanding, harmony and racial integration.

It also appealed for directives be issued to all officers and committees empowered to implement the Planning Acts to respect, safeguard and uphold the rights of all religious groups when applications are submitted to establish religious institutions.

The council also recommended the formation of a National Interreligious Advisory Council to oversee the interest and needs of all religions in the country.

"For the setting up of such a body, we recommend that a protem committee comprising leaders of all the religious groups be first established to draw up the terms of reference," it added.

-- BERNAMA

SBJ AAM