

15 JUL 1999

Parliament-Debate

DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS SHOULD BE WITHIN MALAYSIA'S CONTEXT

KUALA LUMPUR, July 15 (Bernama) -- A Government backbencher today urged the proposed Human Rights Commission to define human rights based on the Federal Constitution and within the context of Malaysia's multiracial society.

Taking part in the debate on the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Bill 1999 in the Dewan Rakyat, Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) said the definition should be based on Malaysia's mould and should not include the human rights doctrine found elsewhere.

He said a local definition of human rights would be appropriate to Article 4 of the Bill pertaining to the functions and power of the commission to create awareness and provide education on what constituted human rights.

Hence the commission should educate the various groups particularly Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the national perception of human rights and not just ape the ideology, doctrine and views of foreigners, which could only destroy the country, Ruhanie said

He said the younger generation should also be prepared so that it would not follow the definition of human rights linked to individualism as this could lead them to go against the government.

Ruhanie hit out at the Opposition which he said worshipped the human rights declarations proclaimed by foreigners particularly the West such as the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 by claiming that it encompassed universal values.

He said universal values were found everywhere particularly in the teachings of all religions.

According to Ruhanie, the West and in particular the United States which had claimed itself to be the Champion of Democracy had violated human rights such as in El Salvador and Vietnam.

He urged the commission to build a human rights framework and perspective in line with the requirements of the people and lay it down as the policy for the future generation specially when there were opposing views on globalisation and nationalism.

As expected the Opposition was trying to belittle the government's efforts to have the commission by comparing it to other Acts, which it claimed were oppressive and violated human rights such as the Internal Security Act, Official Secrets Act, Printing Presses and Publications Act, Sedition Act, Universities and University Colleges Act and so, he said.

Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP- Tanjong) expressed doubts as to the effectiveness and integrity of the commission in discharging its duties to guarantee human rights so long as the other Acts were not abolished.

He said as long as these Acts, which he considered as oppressive existed, the commission's credibility in protecting human rights in Malaysia would be doubted.

Lim said the Bill did not give a wide meaning to human rights and the government too did not refer the Bill to any human rights body such as NGOs or human rights committees before tabling it in Parliament.

He said if the government was sincere in ensuring human rights in the country, the commission's mandate should be wide and in line with the international charter.

Liew Ah Kim (Independent-Seputeh) proposed that the commission's membership be representative of all races and people of different political

leanings so that it could function justly and effectively.

Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar) proposed that its members be skilled in international law particularly pertaining to human rights.

The potential members of the commission should also be well versed with the government's perception on various issues, he added.

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) proposed that wider values be incorporated into the Bill such as universal human values.

He also proposed that the government submit a fresh Universal Declaration of Human Rights taking into account current developments.

This was because Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said the UN Declaration of Human Rights was out of date, Dr Tan said.

The Dewan will sit again on Monday.

--BERNAMA

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