

Suhakam lists statutes for review

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PETALING JAYA: The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) has listed laws which infringe the basic human rights of citizens such as the Internal Security Act, and said it will review and examine them in detail.

It said that although the Government had indicated its intention to review and amend the ISA since 1996, no concrete action had been taken.

Suhakam's Law Reform Working Group would examine laws that provide detention without trial and recommend appropriate action "for their repeal or amendments to restrict their scope," the commission said in its first annual report to Parliament.

The 63-page report was presented to Parliament by Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Musa Hitam yesterday.

Two other statutes which provide for detention without trial are the Emergency (Public Order and the Prevention of Crime) Ordinance 1969 and the Dangerous Drugs (Special Prevention Measures) Act 1985.

Suhakam said the demand for a transparent and accountable government that respects human rights was a fundamental concern of a Malaysian civil society, stating that "for increasingly larger segments of Malaysian society, a full stomach is no longer enough."

Among the other recommendations in the report are that:

- THE Government ratify as soon as possible the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, and the *Convention Against Torture*;

- THE Government take steps to draft new legislation to incorporate the provisions of the conventions which have been ratified into domestic law;

- THE Judiciary be more responsive in interpreting the definition of "human rights" in the Federal Constitution; and

Suhakam: Report not conclusive

STAR 20 APR 2001

FROM PAGE ONE

- THE Government review periodically its reservations to the conventions ratified with a view to their eventual withdrawal.

Suhakam said the public needed to be made more conscious of their basic human rights and government institutions needed to be made more aware of their responsibilities in protecting those rights.

"Once there is consciousness, awareness and respect for basic human rights in all sectors of society and human rights culture exists, the commission believes Malaysia would be ready to be a developed nation with an ethical, liberal, tolerant and caring society, as envisaged under Vision 2020," it said.

Commenting on the report, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government was not bound by Suhakam's views.

"Security is the responsibility of the Government and the police, not Suhakam," he said at a dialogue on African leadership at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Earlier, speaking to reporters at the Parliament lobby, Musa said the report contained only one "provisional recommendation" and no conclusive ones.

He explained that the report did "not call for a government review" of so-called oppressive laws.

"It only lists laws that are being reviewed by us. In other words, the report is not conclusive."

He said the recommendation on peaceful assembly was made because of the current political climate.

"We call it (the recommendation) a provisional one because there are laws governing it which we are looking into.

"Although we have yet to go through the whole period of consultation, the political environment seems to request some sort of urgent attention to this issue," he said.

Musa said that it was now left to the MPs to bring up the issue during their debates.

"The timing is quite right," he said, adding that the report should be read against the backdrop of the overall situation in the country.

TURN TO PAGE THREE