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Musa-Suhakam

MUSA: SUHAKAM WILL PLAY ITS ROLE IN ACCORDANCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), which came under fire over its report on the illegal gathering at Jalan Kebun in Shah Alam on Nov 5 last year, said today it would continue to discharge its duties in accordance with provisions under the Human Rights Act 1999.

Its Chairman Tan Sri Musa Hitam said although there were various perceptions by the people over Suhakam's role, including negative ones, it would honour its responsibilities according to its interpretation of the Act.

There are three former judges and a law professor in Suhakam to ensure it did not act beyond the stipulated legal framework, he said when speaking at the launch of the Human Rights Day by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Suhakam was criticised by various quarters including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over its 66-page report released on Aug 20 on the Jalan Kebun incident which said that the police acted heavy-handedly when dispersing the illegal assemblers.

It also blamed "some existing practices and policies of the police and the other authorities" as the contributory factors to the human rights violations.

Musa, who is also a former deputy prime minister, said among the roles and functions of Suhakam were to instil awareness and educate the masses on human rights, to advise the government on human rights and investigate complaints on human rights violations.

In carrying out its responsibilities, Musa said, Suhakam held dialogues with various groups, including government agencies and non-governmental organisations, to gather information on various issues about human rights in Malaysia that needed to be improved.

When talking about human rights, many people focused only on freedom of expression and politics while the two only formed a small fraction of the whole human rights concept which covered a wider area including social, culture and religious aspects, he said.

Thus, the first Human Rights Day celebrations this year is themed "Human Rights For The Unfortunate."

This is because although the Malaysian government and the people were generally sensitive to the needs of the unfortunate, there were still much to be done for them, he said.

In conjunction with the celebrations, Musa said, a forum would be held to discuss various aspects of human rights of children, women and the handicapped.

He said the recommendations made at the forum would be compiled into a report and submitted to Parliament for consideration.

He also said Suhakam would observe Sept 9 as the Human Rights Day in Malaysia every year to coincide with the date of gazetting of the Malaysian Human Rights Act 1999.

-- BERNAMA

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