

Mahathir: It's my right to attend seminar

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad insists that it is his "right" to attend Suhakam's Human Rights Conference where he will deliver a keynote address.

"I have been invited. That's my right. Are they (NGOs) denying me my human right?" the former prime minister said here yesterday.

Some 30 non-governmental organisations have threatened to boycott Suhakam's conference tomorrow on grounds that Dr Mahathir had "inflicted some very serious

harm" on human rights in the 22 years that he had led the country.

Dr Mahathir said the fact that the NGOs "could say this" proved that the country had defended human rights.

The conference is being held to commemorate Malaysian Human Rights Day.

In their joint statement, the NGOs pointed to a number of human rights violations - Operation Lalang (in 1987); assault on the Judiciary (1988); displacement of 10,000

indigenous people from Bakun (1998) and the incidents involving former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The organising chairman of the conference, Suhakam commissioner Dr Chiam Heng Keng, said the NGOs should have raised this matter when the invitations were sent out in July.

"Why wait until now? It is difficult to make changes because 354 participants have confirmed their attendance," she said yesterday.