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## Arts community peeved over City Hall vetting panel

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - More than 30 arts practitioners have expressed concern over the move by Kuala Lumpur City Hall to form a committee to vet scripts of all future theatre productions.

According to Kakiseni co-founder Kathy Rowland, the arts fraternity was deeply disturbed that City Hall has decided to enforce a series of guidelines that will severely restrict the growth of a vibrant arts community.

"We are worried that these guidelines, limited to the performing arts at the moment, could impact the growth of all forms of public expression and the arts - from filmmaking to visual arts to literature," she said at a Press conference at Five Arts Centre/Dramalab in Taman Tun Ismail here today. It was attended by TV and film actors, stage actors, TV/film directors, writers and others.

Rowland said the City Hall action came without any consultation or negotiation with the arts community.

"We only learnt about the guidelines and the committee chosen to vet the scripts through the Press.

"This body will act as moral guardians with the power to decide which scripts are 'doubtful' or should be rejected.

"It also has the power to censor performances as it sees fit."

She said the move will give a negative impact on aspirations for the arts by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his recent 2004 Budget speech.

"With the RM80.3 million allocated to develop the arts, the Prime Minister affirmed that performing arts are an asset to the country's progressive and dynamic image. City Hall has portrayed itself to be out of step with the direction the nation is taking by its latest action."

The script evaluation committee for theatre performances was set up to ensure that every show has a valid licence from City Hall. It also warrants that performances are held in an atmosphere that is ethical and takes into consideration the interests of all parties and does not give rise to any uneasiness or feelings of unrest.

Among its functions is to discuss, evaluate, vet and approve scripts for theatre productions. It is also empowered to change or delete any part of the script and inform the applicant of the changes that need to be adhered to in the script submitted for approval.

The committee comprises the director-general of Biro Tatanegara Datuk Nordin Kardi, theatre activists Datuk Jins Shamsuddin, Datuk Rahim Razali, S.T. Bala and Gan Hui Yee. Others include representatives from City Hall's Legal Affairs Department, its Culture, Tourism and Sports Department, its Public Affairs and International Unit, and Royal Malaysian Police Publishing Unit and Department of Information Malaysia.

Rowland said a statement endorsed by 250 people from the arts community would be submitted to City Hall requesting a meeting to discuss the matter.