

Abim's poser to Kit Siang: Is IFC the only way?
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Is the IFC the only means for inter-faith dialogue?

This was the question posed by the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (Abim) in response to the call Tuesday by Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang to set up of the Inter-Faith Commission (IFC).

The IFC as advocated by its current backers is not so much about inter-faith understanding and harmony as the promotion and imposition of their views in disregard of Muslims' and Muslim organisations' reservations, said Abim secretary-general Khairul Arifin Mohd Munir..

With particular regard to the issue of religious freedom and conversions out of Islam, proponents of the IFC have been "insensitive" to these reservations and forwarded - without room for disagreements - supposedly 'prescribed international norms', added Khairul in a statement today.

"We call on Mr Lim Kit Siang to stop making assertion that the IFC is the only mechanism for interfaith dialogue and hold others at ransom to accept such assertion.

"We also call on the opposition leader to take into consideration the views of the majority of the Muslims who are against such a proposal when making statements on the IFC and other related issues," he added.

Lim had on Tuesday asked in Parliament why the IFC cannot presently be set up when the government had earlier set up a similar body - the Inter-Religious Council.

Root of the problem

Steps need to be taken urgently to end the erosion of non-Muslims' religious rights and sensitivities as illustrated by such cases as those of the widow of M Moorthy and R Subashini, said Lim.

Fellow DAP parliamentarian Tan Seng Giaw, meanwhile, had asked if there is any way other than the IFC to solve the religious crisis, as non-Muslims are "not always the root of the problem."

"Sometimes it is the Muslims and we need a channel to enable the public to have their complaints heard," he said.

Khairul urged Lim and other DAP leaders to take into consideration the views of the majority of Muslims who are against the IFC proposal.

"We really want to see Mr. Lim and his Democratic Action Party truly promote the interests of all Malaysians regardless of race and religion.

"Reading Mr. Lim's statement in the Parliament on Tuesday, as well as that of his other colleagues participating in the parliamentary debate on that day, we could not but conclude that the opposition leader and his party had not made much progress in this regard," he

said.

Proponents of the IFC have insisted that though dialogue is a vital first step in fostering understanding between communities, the commission would serve further as a platform for channeling issues and grievances to the relevant authorities.

Detractors of the commission, however, have interpreted this to mean it would interfere in matters of intra-faith and affect the practice of Islam, in particular.

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