

**'Exclude gov't reps from minimum-wage council'**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Apr 30, 2011**

A roundtable on minimum wage yesterday came up with a revamped version of the government's proposed minimum wage consultative council, to push for more autonomy and independence in its functions.

The proposal will maintain the government's initial plan of a three-way representation on the council, retaining membership from the private sector and workers groups but replacing government representation with public intellectuals as independent members.

Klang MP Charles Santiago (left), who chaired the meeting, said it is important to give the council independence so that it can push for meaningful improvements to benefit some 1.3 million workers in Malaysia.

"From the statements made by the Human Resource Ministry, the consultative council remains just that, to consult. It means the minister will still have the final say on minimum wage levels," he said.

Charles pointed out that the roundtable proposal mirrors the minimum wage council set up in South Korea, whose 27 members - comprising union, employer and public interest representatives - decide periodically on the republic's minimum wage levels, not the government.

He said both he and Kota Raja MP Siti Mariah Mahmud plan to present the proposal when Parliament convenes in June.

The roundtable also proposed that the government raise its planned minimum wage quantum to the appropriate level of between RM1,500 and RM2,000.

Charles said the present RM700 is unacceptable as it is at the same level as the national poverty level set by the government itself.

"Workers already get paid at that level, so it no longer represents minimum wage. Minimum wage should be a decent living wage. How many single Malaysians will tell you they can survive on RM700, never mind families?"

Charles acknowledged that it is still unclear how exactly to calculate the appropriate minimum wage level, but stressed that it should ultimately benefit both private and public sector workers.

**'Employers must be considered'**

Charles noted, however, that employers must not be left in the lurch when implementing the minimum wage, stressing that not every company can afford to hike wages suddenly.

He said it is up to both the government and civil society to convince companies to think beyond personal profit and focus on contributing positively to the country's development.

Charles said another proposal was for the government to grant tax breaks for companies that adopt the minimum wage policy, especially since the majority of Malaysia's workforce is employed by the small and medium scale industries that are most likely to be significantly affected by such a policy.

It was also recommended that the federal and state governments come up with a binding agreement in all of their contracts and procurement activities, requiring all prospective companies to implement minimum wage.

To lead by example, Charles said Pakatan elected representatives intend to propose to Pakatan-led state

governments to start implementing minimum wage beginning with government-linked companies before expanding to include the whole state civil service.

Some 35 people attended the half-day event yesterday, comprising Pakatan elected representatives, Malaysian Trade Union Council leaders, private and public sector union representatives and academics.

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