

**Church leaders: Act now against 'crusading' Ibrahim
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While choosing not to retaliate, Christian leaders today called on the authorities to act quickly against Pasir Mas parliamentarian Ibrahim Ali for inciting religious hatred. The lack of action, they said, risks further damage.

Speaking to Malaysiakini, Sabah Council of Churches president and Bishop of Sabah Albert Voon said Ibrahim's (right) threat to launch a crusade against Christians is sowing seeds of hatred which will embolden other extremists.

"His statement is very insidious and destructive to harmony and instills hatred against Christians over no basis.

"The church does not feel insecure as our security is based on our relationship with God, but the government should take action to safeguard civil peace," he said, noting that this is not the job of the church which is a spiritual organisation.

He noted that what Ibrahim said was unjustified as it was based on an Utusan Malaysia report on a purported Christian conspiracy to usurp Islam. The report was unsubstantiated and has been refuted.

"When our churches were burnt, did you see Christians retaliate in anger?..It is always the other side which is getting worked up over (one) thing or (an)other," said Bishop Voon.

"(The police say) they are still investigating (the claims of Christian conspiracy)...but imagine if a bishop had used the term crusade - he would be under Internal Security Act (detention) the next day."

Gov't leaders 'shouldn't keep silent'

Similarly, Council of Churches president Reverend Thomas Philips said that it is crucial for government leaders to speak up against such extremist statements.

"With all the statements made, who will speak for those who have been attacked? The silence of leaders, who do not defend the rights of the minority, raises doubts among the minority. One person inciting religious sentiments would arouse many others," he said when contacted.

He added that there are laws to deal with such statements which "incite or create disturbances" and this should provide space for action.

Yesterday, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein reportedly responded to the issue when he said Ibrahim - who heads Malay-rights pressure group Perkasa - does not represent the majority of Malay-Muslims. However, the minister refused to brand him an extremist.

His ministry had issued Utusan a letter of reprimand on Friday but the move was chided by critics as being too lenient.

While Bishop Voon is wary of engaging "such an angry person", Rev Thomas said the church is always open to dialogue as evident in their meeting with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak last week.

'It's the Home Ministry's fault'

Supporting the church leaders is DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, who said Hishammuddin's statement - after his ministry's seemingly lenient action against the Malay daily - has only made matters worse.

“This dangerous lie by Utusan has given a golden opportunity to extremists like Ibrahim to make Christians the object of hate and incite enmity amongst Malaysians,” he said.

“Hishamuddin even went one step further in defending Perkasa and Ibrahim by refusing to brand Ibrahim an extremist for calling for a crusade against Christians.”

He said Ibrahim's open declaration of support for Umno and allegiance to Najib is proof that the NGO's polemic cries are for BN's benefit, especially coming into snap polls.

Lim also chided BN component parties Gerakan and MCA for merely condemning Perkasa in press statements instead of using their position in government to act.

“So far no Gerakan or MCA ministers have dared to press for a cabinet decision insisting that cabinet acts firmly against racists and extremists seeking to burn one Malaysia with these dangerous lies,” he added.

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