

Push decent wages, not minimum wages
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Members of a roundtable on minimum wage today proposed that the government set up a Decent Living Wages Council to replace its planned National Minimum Wage Council.

Klang MP Charles Santiago, who helped put together the roundtable, said it is important to move away from the minimum wage description as it could be used as an excuse to set unreasonably low wage levels.

He explained that if the council stays focussed on minimum wage, there is nothing to stop the government from imposing wage levels that are on par with the average national poverty level.

Charles took the example of security guards, whose basic salaries range from RM700 for those in urban areas to RM500 for guards working in rural areas.

He said if the focus stays on the minimum wage, it would defeat the purpose of having such a council as they could simply decide to take the current maximum wage level as the standard minimum wage.

"...This is nonsensical, because they already receive that salary. That's why we propose for the council to instead focus on decent living wages," he said at a press conference in the Parliament lobby.

The roundtable recently proposed a "reasonable" minimum wage of between RM1,500 to RM2,000 to assist the estimated 1.35 million Malaysians who earn a monthly salary of under RM1,000.

Government not serious

Charles also hit out at the government for not including its minimum wage council proposal in this Parliamentary meeting, despite Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Idris Jala's announcement that the council would be set up by the end of this year.

Charles said setting up such a council will "take a long time", but pointed out that the bill is not listed on the Order Paper for this 10-day Parliamentary meeting.

"If the government is serious, the bill should have come to Parliament today so we can debate it in this meeting. This is very regrettable because the Human Resources Minister (Dr S Subramaniam) said the bill will be tabled this month.

"The public and civil societies have no idea about the contents of the bill. It is clear the government is not taking parliament seriously on minimum wage," he said, adding that he hopes the bill will be tabled as soon as possible.