

Cops visit Seksualiti Merdeka workshop

Malaysiakini.com

November 2, 2011

by Nigel Aw

A human rights workshop by Seksualiti Merdeka last night was visited by police, supposedly based on a tip-off that there was a gathering of gays and lesbians.

Seksualiti Merdeka co-founder Pang Khee Teik, when contacted, said four police officers - two uniformed and two plainclothes - demanded to enter the workshop which was held at the Annexe Gallery, Central Market.

“We refused but they returned with Central Market security and asked us to cooperate so we agreed to let them peek through the door and they left after that.”

Pang said the event - a prelude to the actual festival slated for Nov 9 - was intended to educate participants about the fundamentals of human rights and was attended by supporters and well-wishers of Seksualiti Merdeka.

Responding to the uproar Seksualiti Merdeka has received from religious groups including an impending police report against it, Pang said the festival is meant to support and empower the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and not to promote homosexuality.

‘Is it illegal to ask for compassion?’

He added that some in the LGBT community have been persecuted at home and at school leading to depression, pointing out that the suicide rate among LGBT community was six times higher than the average.

“Is it illegal to ask for compassion : Why kick people who are already down? Why make a vulnerable group more vulnerable by subjecting them to harassment?”

“Malaysia is a cruel place for LGBT, there is no space (for them) , every time we try to get ourselves heard, we are asked to shut up before getting a chance (to speak) , which is why there is Seksualiti Merdeka.”

He added that opponents of Sexualiti Merdeka are welcome to air their views but they should learn to

agree to disagree.

“We are not asking for more rights, just equal rights, the same rights to lead a life and love without fear. People take that for granted because they are born in the majority.

“I just want to appeal to people to appreciate the fact that many Malaysians have contributed to building this country, including the LGBT community.”

Seksualiti Merdeka is an annual festival celebrating the human rights of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and is backed by several NGOs including the Bar Council, Amnesty International and Suaram.

‘Najib must walk the talk’

Meanwhile, the Bar Council in a statement today reiterated its support for Seksualiti Merdeka, stressing that sexual minorities and minority communities at large must be protected.

Noting that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had in an opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald on Oct 27 declared himself as the leader of a “progressive, liberal nation”, Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee called on the premier to dismantle legislation that imposes unwarranted restrictions on individual liberties of the LGBT community.

“Prime Minister Najib wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald that ‘Malaysia is not some repressive, backward nation that persecutes refugees and asylum seekers.’ The Malaysian Bar calls on Najib to apply the same thinking with respect to the LGBT community in Malaysia.

“If Najib seriously wishes to convince his audience in Australia - and elsewhere in the Commonwealth and the world at large - that Malaysia is a ‘progressive, liberal nation’, he must act immediately to end repression, persecution and prosecution of sexual minorities in Malaysia.”