

## **Minorities have rights, too, says Ambiga**

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Former Bar Council chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan today defended the organisers of Seksualiti Merdeka, emphasising that there is a need to respect minority rights.

Ambiga also went on record to say she was not an organiser, but was invited to launch the event on Nov 9 in her personal capacity.

The purpose of Seksualiti Merdeka, she said, is to give the marginalised lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community a voice and a platform to highlight the discrimination that they face in their daily lives.

“It is not an event to encourage homosexuality. I am mindful of the position of the major religions on the issue of homosexuality.

“But this does not mean that we cannot show understanding and sensitivity to a marginalised community that suffers oppression and mental and even physical abuse, because of who they are.

'It does not mean they have no rights'

“It does not mean that we have a right to treat them badly and to attack them mercilessly. It does not mean that they have no rights. The recent reaction (even to the extent of calling them animals ) underscores precisely this point,” she said in a statement.

Ambiga and the event organisers have been under fire lately, with Perkasa and a coalition of Muslim NGOs lodging police reports against the event. Perkasa even called her dajal (antichrist ) and called for the authorities to take action on her and its organisers.

Perkasa has also called for Ambiga to be arrested under the Internal Security Act.

Yesterday, deputy inspector-general of police Khalid Abu Bakar announced the banning of the event “to restore public order”.

Following the decision, the police had also moved in and stopped last night’s forum entitled ‘Nine to Five: Sexuality Rights in the Workplace’.

'No one should have to live in fear'

Ambiga added that the event had been held annually since 2008, garnering little attention until now.

She understood that people may have strong views on the subject.

“They are entitled to have those views. However, I believe that no member of our society should have to live in fear because of who they are.

“I also believe that as fellow human beings who are imperfect, we should show humility and not arrogance. I believe we are duty-bound to understand the plight of those who suffer, no matter who they are,” she emphasised.

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