

## **Seksualiti Merdeka stops all public events**

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The organisers of Seksualiti Merdeka have called off all public events related to the festival.

They said this was due to concerns over the safety of the participants in the programmes, held since 2008 to enhance awareness of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community in Malaysia and promote equal rights for them.

NONE" In the interest of the safety of our participants, we will not proceed with all public events of Seksualiti Merdeka while we seek a meeting with the Inspector-General of Police Ismail Omar to explain the objectives of Seksualiti Merdeka," the organisers said in a statement today.

They said they were saddened that so many Malaysians, including elected representatives, had seen it fit to "relentlessly persecute, stigmatise and discriminate" against all those who have found a safe space to dialogue and share information and knowledge on human rights during Seksualiti Merdeka's events.

"We are Malaysian citizens who are being denied our rights to our identity and self-determination.

"The false allegations and ill-intended remarks made to incite hatred against us are completely unjustified.

"They have further marginalised a group of Malaysians that have long suffered severe marginalisation in society," the organisers added.

Seksualiti Merdeka is an annual festival celebrating the human rights of people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, organised by a loose coalition of NGOs, artistes, activists and individuals.

Various groups and individuals, led by Malay and Islamic organisations, have called on the authorities to clamp down on the four-day Seksualiti Merdeka festival planned to begin in Kuala Lumpur next Wednesday.

They have also launched verbal attacks on the organisers and others involved in the event, which detractors allege promotes homosexuality and other immoral sexual practices.

Two days ago, deputy inspector-general of police Khaled Abu Bakar announced a ban on Seksualiti Merdeka and all events related to the festival.

Ambiga, the 'antichrist'

Among the casualties of the controversy was former Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenevasan, who has been tagged 'antichrist' by some, with others also calling for her to be detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for her support of the group.

On this, the organisers said: "We would also like to express our regret that Ambiga Sreenevasan, whose sole role was to officiate the opening in her personal capacity, has been defamed by those who aggressively and violently oppose the protection, respect, promotion and fulfilment of the human rights of the LGBTIQ community in Malaysia."

They cited Malaysia's membership as a United Nations Human Rights Council member, for which the government "should be ashamed for endorsing and encouraging such intimidation and scare tactics."

"Articles 8 (1), 8 (2) and 10 of our Federal Constitution explicitly guarantee equality of all Malaysians before the law, protection to all Malaysians from discrimination on the basis of gender as well as our freedom of speech and association."

They also cited the response to the complaints on violations of human rights of the LGBTIQ community in Malaysia of the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), which has affirmed its stand that "all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, are entitled to enjoy their basic rights as human beings" and that the LGBT group is not excluded from enjoying such rights.

protest against seksualiti merdeka in shah alam 1 "The Malaysian government should, in fact, condemn all forms of discrimination, stigmatisation and threats of violence and murder in the name of any religion or belief system; and uphold the human rights of the LGBTIQ community and sexual rights as human rights.

"It is in the protection of the individual's human rights that community rights are upheld. Clearly, this is what democracy is all about.

"The Malaysian government should uphold our right to conduct peaceful forums, workshops and performances. The intimidating displays of hatred and ignorance towards us and calls for us to be shut down demonstrate why we absolutely need a safe space and event like Seksualiti Merdeka."

The organisers also expressed their "heartfelt gratitude" to the numerous sectors of Malaysian society that have expressed, and continue to express support for Seksualiti Merdeka's work and the right to

discuss human rights issues.

"We remain committed to creating an enabling environment that will help reduce such unreasonable hostility, such as the incitement of fear and paranoia, caused by the lack of understanding of sexuality issues as human rights issues."

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