

**Small and vulnerable LGBTIQ have rights, too**  
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MP SPEAKS The rule is that you don't put all your years of accrued chips at the centre of the table, where the wheel spins into a void. The Malaysian police, unfortunately, do not share this sentiment.

By banning Seksualiti Merdeka, the government and police have shown the world they are callous, intolerant and homophobic. Furthermore the ban is yet to be justified.

Following the ban, the organisers and other individuals have received threats, lewd and violent messages.

Instead of protecting the rights of the minority lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community, the government has shamelessly endorsed the ongoing persecution and discrimination against them.

Seksualiti Merdeka is an annual sexuality rights festival focusing on the human rights of people who come from diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.

Malaysia signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the United Nations Charter before becoming a member of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, vowing to respect sexual rights as universal rights based on the inherent freedom, equality and dignity of all human beings.

In sharp contrast, organisers of the festival and Ambiga Sreenevasan, who was scheduled to officiate the festival, have come under police questioning.

Government-owned media organisations have ignorantly branded the festival as one that advocates free sex.

If this is not enough some individuals and organisations have gone berserk in the name of religion and called for further persecution against the LGBTIQ community and Ambiga.

It is difficult to get angry about the foolishness displayed by these groups, but it is sad to note that they stoop so low as to use religion to spread fear.

If we could all take a step back and stop labelling people's sexuality, we would be able to see the importance of human relations. We would clearly see the need to respect the rights of all people, irrespective of their sexual orientation and identity, as this is an integral part of every one of us.

The government, instead of fanning hatred and inciting anger, could move to oppose all forms of stereotyping against the LGBTIQ community. It should condemn the bullying and name calling the community has had to endure and ensure they have equal access to education and employment opportunities including enjoyment of basic rights of equality and freedom of expression and association.

The members of the community are targets of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, harassed at the workplace, ostracised by their families and face hate crime-related sexual assault.

They need compassion and support

They occupy the lowest positions in the job market, face discrimination in schools and are unable to access public housing because of their sexual orientation.

In fact, they experience the worst forms of discrimination. They need compassion and state support. Not further discrimination.

But, driven by the need to stay in power, the government has fashioned the controversy surrounding the festival for its own political mileage.

Clearly, the ban on Seksualiti Merdeka also demonstrates the ongoing persecution against Ambiga, who spearheaded the call for electoral reforms in the country.

The government is playing a dangerous game as it has carelessly pitted different communities against one another, while Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak trumpets his 1Malaysia policy, which aims at national integration.

If the government is serious about its commitment to human rights as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, it must provide the democratic space for vulnerable communities to engage in peaceful gatherings and revoke the ban on Seksualiti Merdeka.

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