

It's Seksualiti Merdeka, not Seks Merdeka
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As a Muslim, if I were to chose where to put my time and energy to protest - it would be against corruption, child sexual abuse and polygamous husbands who marry more than one wife in the name of religion and then neglect their wives and children.

I would not waste my time to protest against a once in a year event that is organised by a small group of people who are already marginalised and discriminated.

I think there has been a lot of misconception of what Seksualiti Merdeka is about.

For those who were planning to protest it, have they been to one of their events? It is not about having free sex, rather, it is about who you are, and who you can love without being harrassed or discriminated upon.

And if we do not agree with love between same gender, we do not have to support it. Just like we do not have to go to Genting or drink alcohol even though they are not banned in our country.

But even though if we disagree with homosexuality, we cannot deny that gays and lesbians are very much part and parcel of our society.

They are our lawyers, doctors, engineers, farmers, teachers and politicians, not to mention our brothers, sisters, nieces or nephews. We may recognise the males as lelaki lembut eventhough not all of them are homosexuals.

I personally know a few 'lelaki lembut' - one who holds a high civil service post administering the government coffers, one who is a PhD scholar, and yet another who devotes his life to helping people with cancer.

What would we do without these people in our country?

We live in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, much like in Medina when our beloved Prophet Mohammad lived. And following the footsteps of the Prophet, we have learned to accept each other's differences. This is Sunah Nabi.

Prophet Mohammad was a leader not only for Muslims but non-Muslims as well, some of whom were Jews, Christians and pagans. He did not go and protest or ban others' ways of life or beliefs. All were allowed to practise their way of life as long as they did not break the covenant of peace.

Perhaps those who opposed Seksualiti Merdeka confused the word sexuality with sex. It has been misunderstood as Sex Merdeka, rather than Seksualiti Merdeka.

Sexuality is not sex. All humans have a sexuality, whether you are gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, intersexed, or straight as an arrow (that means heterosexual). Sexuality Merdeka does not mean free sex, but the freedom to be your own sexual identity without being discriminated against.

I attended it the first year in 2008. It was an interesting mix of art, music and lectures, including a very good one by the historian Farish Noor about Hikayat Panji Semerang, a legend about a courageous Indonesian-Malay princess who had disguised herself as a male warrior, like Mulan, the historical Chinese heroine.

There was nothing about going out and having free sex. In fact, it was affirming the diversity in our country, that no one should be discriminated or left out based on their gender, race, religion or sexual

orientation.

I do not find that against my belief as a Muslim and as a Malaysian. In fact, it affirms it. God says in the Qur'an:

"See you not that Allah sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out produce of various colors. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of color, and black intense in hue. And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colors. Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving." (Fatir 35:27-28)

Islam teaches us that diversity is a fact of nature. We are created differently so that we may know each other.

In the verse, I think colours don't just mean the colour of things, but the many different kinds of beings in appearances, behaviours and abilities. God said He could have created a single People, but He did not because He has a plan. It is to test our tolerance, compassion and mercy to embrace diversity.

"To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute (al-Ma'idah 5:48)

As we celebrate Hari Raya Korban, we enter its deeper meaning of sacrifice, of learning the value of life, and of sharing food with the poor.

Others may not understand this sacred practise. In the West, Muslims may not be able to sacrifice the cattle in an open field to commemorate Prophet Ibrahim's submission to the Lord because of their hygiene policy.

Others may protest and accuse us of cruelty to animals, failing to understand its deeper meaning. But thankfully, I have not heard of any banning of our right to celebrate Hari Raya Aidul Adha.

I hope as we show mercy to others whose way of life we may not agree or understand, we will follow the higher jihad, the jihad to overcome our own personal evils, our little syaitans to judge others.

For who are we humans to judge when the Final Judgment belongs to Allah.

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