

**Our UK diplomat brings us shame**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**February 13,2012**  
**Mariam Mokhtar**

Who would have thought that the unguarded and callous words of Malaysia's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Zakaria Sulong, would reveal Malaysian policy towards its own people and its attitude to animal suffering?

Zakaria had criticised reports on Malaysia by foreign NGOs as issues which "range from politics to petty issues like animals in zoos and the Penans in Sarawak".

His comments did not cause a diplomatic incident, but if a report of his interview were to make its way into the British media, he will be vilified.

Where is his compassion and understanding of human nature? Did he have a lapse in judgment when he made those insensitive remarks?

When members of the Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) Sarawak branch called on him in London, Zakaria allegedly claimed that NGOs in the United Kingdom that have "championed the cause of Malaysia, including Sarawak, have hidden and personal agendas".

"What we do is collect reports on all the good and bad things written or said about the country and send them back to Malaysia. Issues range from politics to petty issues like animals in zoos and the Penans in Sarawak."

Zakaria singled out the Bruno Manser Foundation (BMF) and said, "They have their own perceived ideas and they refused to accept facts."

He failed to outline the true intentions of the NGOs, nor were we told if the Sarawak reporters had asked him what these hidden and personal agendas were.

Out of touch with reality

Zakaria may be out of touch with reality and with the situation at home and in the country where he is currently posted.

His outrageous claims, that the treatment of animals in zoos are petty, will upset most people; Malaysian or British.

In his host country, the British are a nation of animal lovers and they may treat some of their animals, pets or otherwise, better than they treat some of their fellow human beings. On the other hand, some people may claim that Malaysians are more inclined to abuse both humans and animals, in our dog-eat-dog world.

The well-being of animals is not only neglected in Malaysian zoos. Was Zakaria aware that last year, Malaysians were horrified to hear of dead and half-starved cats, soaked in urine and faeces in two catteries; one in Damansara Damai and another in Desa Moccis in Sungai Buloh?

In Ipoh, city council dog-shooters indiscriminately shoot dogs even though these animals are properly licensed.

Three years ago, several dogs were dumped on Pulau Selat Kering by Pulau Ketam residents with the endorsement of the Klang municipal councillor in charge of the island.

Perhaps the attitude of the Malaysian government towards animals is best encapsulated in what Malacca Chief Minister Mohamad Ali Rustam said in 2010, about the animal research facility in Malacca.

Despite protests that animals risked being abused because Malaysia lacked proper regulations on animal research, Ali courted further controversy, when he said: "God created animals for the benefits of human beings. That's why he created rats and monkeys ... We cannot test on human beings.....This is the way it has to be. God created monkeys, and some have to be tested."

To justify his statement, he said that eating animals was cruel and yet widely accepted.

Penans 'a petty issue'?

However, the most contentious statement by our high commissioner to UK was when he called the Penans a "petty issue" and lumped their struggles for justice in the same breath as the "petty issue of animals in the zoo".

If the high commissioner needed reminding, the first reports of young girls and women being raped by logging company employees in the Baram district of Sarawak surfaced in 2008.

Credit should be given to Dr Ng Yen Yen for forming a task force to investigate the rapes but despite detailed reports, the results were only revealed after intense public pressure.

The Women Family and Community Development Minister, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, remained silent about the government's next course of action and to this day, none of the Penan women have received justice.

As in the National Feedlot Corporation scandal, inaction seems to be Shahrizat's forté.

Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud's government has denied the rape claims, with various ministers saying the Penans are "nomads and are thus easily manipulated by 'negative' NGOs" or that, "They change their stories, and when they feel like it... Penan are very good storytellers."

Girls have been beaten unconscious, then raped after hitching rides to school on logging trucks. They became pregnant and the federal government task force confirmed that girls as young as 10 had been raped.

In London, the high commissioner continues his denial of the Penan problem, calling it petty.

It is not just the rapes; The Penan ancestral lands, their native rights and their way of life are being stolen by the chief minister and companies under his control.

So, is the high commissioner under pressure from the Sarawak government or the administration of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak?

Did Zakaria insult the Penans because they do not figure as a constituency?

Or is it because there aren't ample photo opportunities for him to be seen demonstrating his care and concern, just like he did when the world's attention was focussed on the Malaysian student, 20-year-old Mohd Asyraf Raziq Rosli, who was injured by a gang in the London riots?

Is Zakaria atypical of the current breed of diplomats? Or do these overseas missions lack support from Wisma Putra?

Zakaria thinks animal suffering is petty and he belittles the suffering of his fellow Malaysian, the Penan. He is silent about the apology by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for airing programmes by FBC Media, which had received RM84 million of the taxpayers' money from Najib and Taib, to spruce up their images.

Will Zakaria be prepared to issue an apology and tender his resignation? His "petty issue" quip makes a mockery of Malaysia's role in the UN Human Rights Council and brings the country into disrepute.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd  
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/188971>