

**Suaram: Stop threats and harassment on Bersih**  
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**By Suaram**

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), a regional human rights group representing 49 non-governmental organisations across Asia, today urged the Malaysian government to respect the fundamental right to peaceful assembly by allowing the Bersih 3.0 rally tomorrow demanding electoral reforms in Malaysia to proceed without any disruption.

Bersih 3.0, organised by polls reform group Bersih, is held in response to the lack of progress in the electoral reforms following a similar rally organised by the same group on July 9 last year.

Forum-Asia denounced the government's threats against the organisers, including a warning by Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein on April 26 that the government will use all necessary means to prevent the rally.

On April 20, the police arrested Tan Hon Kai, an intern at Malaysian human rights group Suaram, allegedly for trespassing, while he was putting up a Bersih 3.0 poster in Penang. Meanwhile, another seven were detained briefly for questioning by the police for distributing Bersih 3.0 flyers in Kuala Lumpur on April 25.

Furthermore, the Kuala Lumpur City Hall has also raided the protest camps set up at Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) by activists and students, who are demanding free tertiary education and are set to camp at the venue until tomorrow to converge with the BersihH 3.0 rally.

Six students and activists have been arrested to this day, since they set up their camps on April 14. The Kuala Lumpur mayor has warned that Kuala Lumpur City Hall will act against participants in the Bersih 3.0 rally in a similar manner as it did with the students.

"These developments leading up to the Bersih sit-in, which include arrests and harsh warnings, are totally unwarranted and deplorable. The government's responses also suggest a disturbing likelihood of a harsh crackdown by the government on the rally tomorrow.

"Given the dismal track record of the government in responding to public assemblies, we fear that another crackdown is imminent," warned Forum-Asia's executive director Yap Swee Seng.

A similar rally held last July, also organised by BERSIH, was met with violence by the police, who deployed teargas and water cannons, and arrested more than 1,500 individuals.

Forum-Asia stresses that all previous rallies and events organised by Bersih have been peaceful, and notes that tomorrow's rally will be a major test of the government's commitment to protecting fundamental human rights, particularly in the application of the newly-enacted Peaceful Assembly Act 2012.

"The new legislation is purportedly intended to allow assemblies that are peaceful in nature. Notwithstanding our criticism of this new law, the government's claims remain to be validated.

"The government should view the Bersih 3.0 rally as an excellent opportunity to make good its commitment, based on the good track record of Bersih as an organisation, as well as the home minister's own admission that the organisers would not pose a threat to security," Yap said.

Yap adds, "As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, Malaysia has made commitments to the protection of human rights in various fora on numerous occasions. If the government does not intend to make a mockery of its own international commitments, it must allow the rally to proceed without any

disruption, and ensure that the police facilitate the rally in compliance with international human rights standards.

"The government should also instruct the federal government-appointed Kuala Lumpur City Hall to immediately remove the steel barricades mounted at the venue of the rally since last night."

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