

Bersih supporter hit by tear gas may lose sight in one eye

MalaysiaKini.com

May 24, 2012

By Susan Loone

One of the most serious victims of tear gas during the chaos of Bersih 3.0 rally has come forward today to tell his tale of woe.

Asrul Wadi Ahmad, 26, from Kepala Batas, has been reviewed by four doctors and may be diagnosed as blind in the right eye if his condition does not improve in six months.

Asrul (second from right) said he was hit by a tear gas canister directly on his face at about 3.15pm around Masjid Jamek, when he was participating in the Bersih protest on April 28.

A member of the public has uploaded a video of the incident on Youtube.

“I lost vision in my right eye, and whenever I look, there is a black spot in my vision. The doctors I consulted told me that the impact on my eye had been due to an object which hit it at high speed,” Asrul told a press conference in Penang.

Asrul said the situation was calm when he was around Masjid Jamek, but suddenly turned chaotic when the tear gas was fired into the crowd.

When the canister hit him, Asrul fell to the ground and was assisted by members of the public who took him to a nearby hospital, where he was given nine stitches below his eyes.

When asked if he regretted his decision to participate in the rally, Asrul said, “No, this is the people’s struggle.”

He added that he would join another rally if a Bersih 4.0 was organised.

“As youths of the nation, we have a responsibility to ensure that our country remains democratic,” he stressed.

Asrul is in the process of initiating legal action against the police for his condition. He has also lost his job as a mechanical engineer in a manufacturing company in Penang, where he had been offered the job before the Bersih event.

“They told me the job needs someone with good eyesight, and with my condition, I can no longer be a suitable employee,” he lamented.

The Bersih event, following the firing of tear gas, had resulted in scores injured, including journalists covering the event, who claimed they were beaten by the police while on duty.

Doc: Asrul can only see hand movements

Meanwhile, a medical doctor Dr Khim Pa, who accompanied Asrul during the press conference, said the impact of the tear gas canister on the victim's eye was "very serious".

"There was damage to the interior chamber of his eyes, his iris was damaged, and there is a blood clot behind his retina," said the doctor.

"According to the eye specialist, his eyes could not be operated on as there is already scarring on his retina and his nerves there are damaged," he added.

"If he looks at you, Asrul can only see hand movements and not fingers, he can only see a bit around the edges," he stressed.

Dr Pa said that Asrul's blindness may be permanent and in six months if his condition does not improve, he will be certified as "legally blind".

Meanwhile, Suaram secretariat member Ong Jing Cheng condemned the police for their violence and the attorney-general for persecuting Bersih participants.

Ong said the police and the AG's office have become "instruments" of the government to bully the people.

"Both these institutions have been used to instill fear in the people who participate in peaceful gatherings," said Ong at the same press event.

Ong said after two major rallies by Bersih - on July 9 last year, and April 28 - the government and Election Commission have yet to view seriously the demands of Bersih for clean and fair elections.

Victims urged to lodge police reports

He urged victims of police abuse during the last Bersih rally who live in the northern region to come forward and lodge police reports, if they have not done so.

"It is best that we from Suaram try to accompany the victims to lodge police reports because we have received complaints that some who go by themselves are instead abused by the police," said Ong.

The victims are also urged to lodge reports with the National Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), which has pledged to conduct a public enquiry on the police violence.