

**Bersih: EC's appointed observers mere PR exercise**  
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Electoral reform group Bersih has slammed the Election Commission's move to unilaterally appoint five NGOs as observers for the 13th general election as a public relations exercise.

"EC's recent announcement on the selection of five NGOs as observers for the GE13 may be dismissed by the public as a public relations exercise due to flaws on both the selection criteria and the restrictions in observation.

azlan"Bersih calls for electoral observation to be made a legal right open to all so that all interested groups can apply to be accredited based on objective criteria. Election observers must also enjoy substantial freedom to carry out their task," it said in a statement yesterday.

It noted that even election watchdog Malaysian Election Observers' Network (MEO-Net) which exposed vote buying in the Sarawak state election, had been excluded as an observer.

Furthermore, Bersih adds that the five appointed observers were also constrained by "ridiculous prohibitions, among them they were:

- a) Prohibited from observing ballot counting process
- b) Prohibited from taking photographs of fraud without presiding officer's approval
- c) Prohibited from speaking to party agents and polling staff
- d) Prohibited from speaking to media
- e) Observers must stay at the same polling station throughout the day
- f) Prohibited from releasing information to third party before reporting to EC

"With these ridiculous and unjustified restrictions, as well as the EC's failure to hold open public consultations on its policy on election observation, the sincerity of the EC in allowing independent election observing is called into question," it said.

The EC has named five NGOs to be accredited as official election observers for the next general election - think-tanks Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli); graft watchdog Transparency International-Malaysia, human rights body Association for Promotion of Human Rights (Proham) and independent pollster Merdeka Centre.

Describing the move as the "exact opposite" of good criteria that an election observation should have, namely to be inclusive, transparent and free, Bersih called for a relook into the appointments.

"The policy must include objective accreditation criteria for both international and national observers to apply," it said.

It also reiterated its call for the government to invite international observers for the next

election.

"Election observations need not be feared if there are no fraud and irregularities to hide."

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