

**'A third of Sarawak interior folk denied voting rights'**  
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**By Aidila Razak**

About one-third of the people election observer group Malaysian Election Observer Network (Meo-Net) has met in the interiors of Sarawak cannot register as voters because they are not documented.

This is despite the fact that they are born in Malaysia, have lived in the country all their lives and are of the eligible age, Meo-Net coordinator Ong Boon Keong said today.

"We registered about a couple of thousand people as voters last year. They represent two-thirds of those we met, while the others are undocumented," Ong said when contacted.

Ong said those that Meo-Net keeps track of have remained undocumented despite the Home Ministry's registration drive from 2009 to 2011, through its mobile registration units.

"Nobody can say where the mobile units are located. We are in touch with the Miri units, which go to the Baram area, but they are a bit secretive about when and where they go.

"The villagers tell us they go to the Long San area to queue up to register. Those from one village, Long Naah, went to Long San twice but never made it to the head of the queue and were told to go back and to wait for the units to go to their village," Ong said.

However, he said, no unit came to Long Naah by the Dec 31, 2011, deadline and the 30-odd villagers remained undocumented.

The National Registration Department has also not published, since 2009, the number of people it has registered through its mobile units.

"The lack of personal documentation affects the people more than voting rights," Ong added.

Millions of ringgit allocated by NRD

According to the National Registration Department's 2011 strategic plan, 44,115 people in Sarawak and 198,885 in Sabah were undocumented as of August 2010.

NRD director-general Alwi Ibrahim was reported to have said that the department had planned for 67 outreach programmes in 2011, including in the interiors of Baram.

Alwi was also reported by the Borneo Post as saying that NRD Sarawak allocated RM20 million in 2010 alone for these outreach programmes.

Ong said Meo-Net, which is the only NGO conducting voter registration in the interiors of Sarawak, had also faced problems getting the voter registration forms registered within deadlines.

He said some 75 percent of the forms submitted by Meo-Net's team of less than 20 people were held up at the Election Commission for more than three months.

"They eventually got processed after we made a lot of noise in Putrajaya and in Kuching.

Now, about 10 percent of forms get rejected for matters like incomplete address or 'missing information'," he said.

As far as he knows, Ong added, the EC does not send its registrars into the interiors of Sarawak to register eligible voters there.

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