

Anwar backs laws against gays but calls for review

MalaysiaKini.com

July 18, 2012

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Parliamentary opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim told the Kuala Lumpur High Court that there should be laws to discriminate against homosexuals to protect the sanctity of heterosexual marriage.

Anwar, who is suing Utusan Malaysia for defamation, said this when quizzed by Firoz Hussein, lawyer for the Umno-owned newspaper.

Firoz: Should the laws of Malaysia discriminate against homosexuals?

Anwar: Yes.

However, Anwar added that archaic laws against homosexuality should be reviewed, in order to protect innocent people from being punished.

Anwar had filed the suit on Jan 20, claiming that the defendants had published a front-page article which he claimed distorted his statements on laws against homosexuality made during an interview with the BBC.

He is claiming RM150 million in aggravated and exemplary damages and other relief deemed fit by the court.

Anwar is also seeking an injunction to ban the defendants from uttering or publishing further defamatory statements against him.

When asked outside the courtroom later what the opposition leader meant when he agreed to discriminate against homosexuals, Anwar said the question was not properly put to him.

"'Discrimination' is not a correct term... but the issue is we should not allow its practice in the public domain," he said.

Elaborating further about the review of "archaic laws" on homosexuality, Anwar said: "There are punishments, but they are draconian and that is the issue. My meaning is not to punish people based on prejudice," he said.

Utusan had carried a front-page article titled 'Tolak Anwar - Hasan' on Jan 17, in which the Permatang Pauh MP and PKR de facto leader was chastised by sacked former Selangor PAS commissioner Hasan Ali.

Hasan attacked Anwar for questioning the country's anti-homosexuality laws and for allegedly wanting to legalise lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activities.

It also published another article on the same day, titled 'Parasit ancam PAS, Anwar mesti tolak', on page 10.

Laws open to abuse

Hasan's comments came after Anwar's interview was aired over the BBC last week, in which he called for a review of "archaic laws" of the country.

In the interview, Anwar was reported to have said: "We, Muslims and non-Muslims generally believe and (are) committed to support the sanctity of marriage between men and women in Malaysia.

"But we should not be seen as punitive and consider the archaic laws as relevant. We need to review them. We do not promote homosexuality in public sphere and domain.

"We will not make apologies towards that... I think to use this sort of legislation to be punitive, punishing innocent people cannot be condoned or be tolerated."

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