

Global Bersih's open letter to the UN sec-gen

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The United Nations must show strong moral leadership to address Malaysia's dangerous descent into violence, escalating racial tension and manipulation of electoral rolls as the country heads into its most critical federal elections in history.

We therefore urge UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council to take account of these serious issues in the run up to Malaysian's 13th general election and UN Universal Periodic Review.

Ban and the United Nations have an obligation to urge Prime Minister Najib Razak and his Umno-led Barisan Nasional government to respect and observe free and fair elections in practice as well as in principle.

Why?

There are now widespread reports of death threats against opposition politicians and NGO leaders, and burgeoning allegations of fraudulent voter rolls, which Najib Abdul Razak's government is openly unwilling to address or rectify.

When Malaysia's Parliament was dissolved on April 3, Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi wrote on Twitter: "We shall move to the warzone to kill all adverse political intruders."

Last month, at a rally led by Home Affairs Minister and Umno party vice-president Hishammuddin Hussein, his supporters threatened to kill opposition MP and PKR vice-president Tian Chua, chanting "Kill Tian Chua" when roused to support Umno and its allies.

Elsewhere, the opposition's meet-the-people sessions have been violently disrupted by motorcycle gangs, unchallenged by the police force.

The Malaysian government is fanning the sort of racial tensions that erupted into 1969's race riots, which saw thousands of Malaysians die, many at the hands of the armed forces. Today, Malaysians believe the riots were engineered to bolster Umno's position after election setbacks that year.

A much-maligned and government-funded cinematic depiction of the riots, *Tanda Putera*, is now being screened to targeted audiences. The film blames the violence on the opposition and minority races. Rural Malays are being openly bussed by the hundreds to "private" screenings amid a Malaysian cabinet ban on "public" showings.

In the past week, leading opposition MP and PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar had her case against the Election Commission thrown out of court, despite presenting evidence of

4,773 dubiously registered voters in her constituency. The number of suspect new-voter registrations included 133 non-residents and three dead people. The number of dubious names on the rolls totalled 7 percent of her electorate.

There is mounting evidence of tens of thousands of 'phantom' voters - people who don't exist - registered on the electoral rolls, including for Sabah and Selangor, two key states that could potentially tilt this year's election outcome.

Malaysia's former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad continues to promote his message of fear and division in the compliant, state-owned media, raising concerns that his and Najib's party Umno are more determined than ever to steal these elections.

Critics of the Najib government continue to be slandered and frozen out of taxpayer-funded media networks and government-licensed newspapers and broadcasters, and the opposition has been given only 10 minutes to present its election manifesto to Malaysians via state-controlled TV and radio.

Mahathir and other members of Najib's party have urged that civil society leader and Bersih 2.0 co-chair Ambiga Sreenevasan to be stripped of her citizenship, and have also threatened her with violence at her home.

The Najib government continues to accuse Bersih 2.0's calls for electoral reform - which have been supported by hundreds of thousands of Malaysians in peaceful public rallies over the past three years - as a "foreign-backed plot" to overthrow the 56-year-old Barisan Nasional regime.

Global Bersih, an arm of the Kuala Lumpur-based electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0, believes that the international community and United Nations have a moral obligation to support these Malaysians.

A similar statement calling on Julia Gillard's Australian government and David Cameron's UK government to act has today also been issued by Global Bersih.

The United Nations has an obligation to ensure democracy is unfettered, rather than turn a blind eye while supporting the Najib government's empty rhetoric of reform, as Malaysia plays lip service to human rights and democracy in an attempt to retain its position on the UN Human Rights Council.

Malaysia now stands at a crucial point in its history. The UN, UK and Australia can and must play a critical role in ensuring a close UN member, Commonwealth friend and ally like Malaysia heeds its democratic obligations and respects the rights of its citizens without resorting to widespread violence, intimidation and electoral fraud.

