

Forum-Asia: Drop charges against activists
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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia) has condemned the charges filed against activists and opposition leaders over the past two weeks up to yesterday.

Calling for the charges to be dropped, Forum-Asia, which represents 47 organisations from 16 countries across Asia, deplored the post-election crackdown on dissent by the government following allegations of electoral irregularities in the May 5 general election.

In an open letter to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Forum-Asia urged the government to allow peaceful dissent in all forms.

NONE" This is in light of a warning made by the inspector-general of police that participants in the May 8 rally would be arrested.

"While the rally on May 8 proceeded peacefully, without any arrests or police intervention, the government went on to charge the organiser of the rally, together with six others for organising similar rallies in other parts of the country.

"We regret the charges against the organisers for having allegedly failed to serve sufficient notice for the rallies to police.

"The rallies have proceeded peacefully and these charges appear to be only aimed at silencing political opposition and discouraging the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the country," Forum Asia's acting executive director Giyoun Kim said.

PKR communications head Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad was charged under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 (PAA) with not serving ample notice to the police to hold the Black 505 rally on May 8.

NONETHis was followed with the PAA charges against six opposition leaders yesterday .

Forum-Asia also cited last week's arrest and charging under the Sedition Act of student activist Adam Adli Abdul Halim and the candlelight vigil in support of Adam Adli that led to 18 other arrests as further examples of the government's

inappropriate actions.

'Najib reneged on respect for human rights'

Forum-Asia further claimed that Najib had reneged his promise of greater respect for human rights when he took his oath of as prime minister office in April 2009.

UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Maina Kiai, has also expressed concern over the restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Malaysia, as well as on the flaws in the PAA.

Reiterating calls to drop the charges against the opposition leaders and activists, Giyoun said continuing to pursue the charges against rally organisers under the PAA would only renew and heighten international criticism of Malaysia.

NONEGiyoun also expressed concern over Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's statement warning protesters they "will pay a heavy price" if protests and rallies continued, and Kuala Lumpur police chief Mohmad Salleh's warning that police "can no longer tolerate" candlelight vigils.

"The Malaysian government must recognise that its international legitimacy as a self-proclaimed democratic government is already in jeopardy.

"Given that the international community is keenly watching developments in Malaysia, it will only be in the interest of the government to end its crackdown on dissent and the opposition, and drop all charges in relation to the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," Giyoun added.

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