

## **DAP ridicules gov't declaring Comango illegal**

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DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua today ridiculed the Home Ministry's declaration that NGO coalition Comango is illegal - drawing similarities with the government's ban on Bersih 2.0, which was later overturned by the High Court.

Pua said current Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (right) is trying to "outdo" his predecessor, Hishamuddin Hussein, who declared Bersih 2.0 an illegal organisation despite it also being a loose coalition.

"Firstly, like Bersih 2.0, Comango is a coalition of 54 NGOs which never regarded itself as a society but merely a common platform for the NGOs to collaborate, share and present their views," Pua said in a statement today.

The Home Ministry in its statement yesterday argued that Comango was illegal because it was not registered with the Registrar of Societies (ROS).

Hishamuddin used a similar argument in banning Bersih 2.0, but this argument was quashed by the High Court in its decision in July 2012.

Pua also said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is equally responsible for the actions of his ministers and that Najib is "sleeping with religious bigots and extremists".

He asserted that the repeated move proved the consistent "irrationality" of the Home Ministers Hishamuddin Hussein and Zahid Hamidi, and the prime minister had obviously failed to learn from the recent embarrassment meted by the High Court.

Assault on freedom

Meanwhile, Human rights group Amnesty International (AI) has also slammed the government ban on Comango as an "assault on freedom".

In a statement yesterday evening, AI's Southeast Asia researcher-campaigner Hazel Galang-Folli said the Home Ministry move was a "disturbing assault on the rights to freedom of expression and association".

"Outlawing Comango is a deeply disturbing action aimed at silencing important

critical voices that have advocated on the world stage for Malaysia to uphold international human rights law and standards," Galang-Folli said.

As a coalition of different NGOs rather than a single organisation, the coalition is not bound by the requirement to register under Malaysia's Societies Act, she added.

Fifty-four local civil society organisations formed the coalition to collate Malaysia's human rights issues to be referred to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on human rights that was conducted in Geneva last year.

While the report was predictably unflattering and raised the ire of the ruling BN, which tried to attack the group saying it was "unIslamic", some have pointed out that some of Malaysia's strongest criticisms during the UPR came from fellow Muslim countries.

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