

MCA: Not wrong to discuss harmony bills publicly
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MCA Youth has come to the defence of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) following criticism of it for publicly discussing the harmony bills it is drafting to replace the Sedition Act.

Among the critics was Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who singled out the Bar Council, whose former president Lim Chee Wee is assisting the NUCC on the draft bills, and said the matter should be discussed behind closed doors.

"The MCA Youth Legal Bureau views with grave concern over critics saying that the details of the three harmony bills should not be discussed in public but should instead be done behind closed doors," its chief Eric Choo said.

Choo said on the contrary, public discussion was in fact positive progress and development on the process of law-making.

"(It) is more transparent, and one which takes into account the wants and needs of the rakyat when the lawmakers legislate new laws that will affect the people," he said in a statement today.

Choo, a lawyer by profession, said the practice was no different from the "green paper" process in modern democracies.

'Right thing to do'

"As such, the MCA Youth Legal Bureau fully supports the initiatives by the NUCC working committee to continue engaging with stakeholders, to listen and adopt the views of the people, in drafting the harmony bills...," he said.

He also called both sides of the political divide to engage with the government-backed bi-partisan NUCC on the draft laws.

The draft bills were prepared by the NUCC's working committee on law and policy, which is headed by PAS' Parit Buntar MP Mujahid Yusof Rawa, with Lim Chee Wee as his deputy.

Meanwhile NUCC chairperson Samsuddin Osman acknowledged the criticism and said the full council would deliberate the working committee's input on next Wednesday.

"All these will serve as inputs for our review and once analysed and decided upon by the full council, it will be submitted to the attorney-general as our input to the actual drafting

of the harmony bills," Samsuddin said in a statement.

He described the criticism against the NUCC panel as part of the democratic process.

'Criminalising bigotry'

"In moving forward and enhancing national unity, we must also recognise that in a modern and democratic Malaysia, consultation and consensus building are very essential for the engagement and participation of all sections of Malaysian society.

"NUCC therefore engages with all sections so as to build a better Malaysia for all Malaysians," he said.

Samsuddin gave his assurance that the policies and laws the NUCC was proposing would be consistent with the Federal Constitution, particularly in the areas of religion, ethnicity, royalty, language and the special position of the bumiputera.

The three proposed bills are the Racial and Religious Hate Crime Bill, National Harmony and Reconciliation Bill and National Harmony and Reconciliation Commission Bill.

If passed, they would criminalise bigotry and outlaw discrimination beyond what is allowed under the Federal Constitution.

The proposed laws have faced fierce opposition from right-wing groups that claim it will undermine the special position of the Malays and bumiputera, Malay language, Islam and the royalty.

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