

Bersih slams Felda for withholding Raya aid
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Bersih has slammed Felda's lack of compassion during the holy month of Ramadan by depriving them of their rightful payout for being critical of the agency.

"Dividends are an entitlement to all shareholders, who include settlers, while Raya aid should be given in keeping with the spirit of the religious festival.

"They should not be used as weapons against those who are holding the authority to account via legal means," said Bersih chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah (left).

She was responding to the Felda board of directors decision to withhold dividend payments and Hari Raya aid to settlers who have initiated legal action against Felda.

A Felda spokesperson told Malaysiakini yesterday that their move was to "safeguard the interests of other settlers who contributed to Felda's development".

"The timing of the announcement, in the month of Ramadan and with Hari Raya Aidil Fitri only two days away, makes the message from the Felda administration all the more crude - no room for tolerance and compassion, even if it is the holy month," said Maria.

Felda has faced a series of lawsuits in recent years, particularly due to opposition from settlers against the transferring of the agency's massive palm oil lands to Felda Global Ventures Holdings (FGV) Berhad and its subsequent public listing in 2012.

Maria said Felda should not be using such payments as an way to silence settlers who are upset.

'Carrots for silence'

"What the Felda administration could have done is to hold discussions with settlers on their grievances, rather than dangling dividends and aid as carrots for their silence and compliance.

Instead, Felda appears to be bent on penalising the settlers and making them examples of what can befall to those who challenge authority," she said.

Maria said Felda, which is largely owned by government-linked companies, should reconsider its action as Putrajaya's image of a caring government depended on it.

Meanwhile, Kinibiz reported that the Minority Shareholder Watchdog Group (MSWG) as

saying that Felda's decision was against Malaysian company laws.

"Each shareholder of the same class will have to be treated the same, including payments of equal amount of dividend per share," Rita Bushon, who is CEO of the MSWG, stressed in an email response to KiniBiz.

"As long as they are legitimate registered shareholders, the dividends cannot be withheld," she was quoted as saying.

In response this afternoon, a Felda spokesperson told Malaysiakini the dividends did not come from FGV shares held by the settlers but from a special trust fund.

"This is not for registered shareholders. It is coming from a settler's trust fund," he said.

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