

## **NGO: 'Project IC' had hand in Sabah's politics**

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Lawyers for Liberty (LFL) said it is serious that the royal commission of inquiry (RCI) has admitted the possibility of the existence of 'Project IC and how it played a vital role in the Sabah electoral results.

This follows the unveiling of the report on Wednesday, that concluded that the issuing of ICs was not motivated by political reasons but pure profit.

"Of particular concern is the finding that 'it was more likely than not, that Project IC did exist'.

"That is, the systemic incorporation of irregular immigrants through dubious documentations and facilitating their access to become registered voters and possibly determine political outcomes in Sabah," said LFL executive director Eric Paulsen (left) in a statement today.

The project, which some have claimed to be a brainchild of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, allowed the issuing of identity cards to illegal immigrants, causing a population boom in the state.

He said Project IC had serious impact on the immigration problem in Sabah and urged the authorities to set up a permanent secretariat and a management committee on foreigners or consultative council on immigrants/foreigners "in order to further inquire and deliberate on the many pressing issues raised in the report".

Paulsen also urged standard operating procedures (SOP) on citizenship issues to be reinforced and harsher actions to be taken on perpetrators.

"The SOP must be tightened to ensure that only those who are genuinely eligible can benefit from citizenship matters.

"Those who perpetrate or facilitate such illegal acts particularly government officials, local leaders, fixers and middle men, politicians and their workers must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law," he said.

However, Paulsen added that the authorities should be "reasonable" in their judgement when investigating the migrants and not "discard" their human rights.

"We must be mindful these are generations of migrants and refugees with varying histories and circumstances, many of whom have permanently settled in Sabah, intermarried, born or lived all their lives in the state.

“We urge the authorities to be objective, take a rights-based, reasonable and realistic approach and not let prejudicial, populist or xenophobic sentiments cloud their judgment,” said Paulsen.

The RCI was first mooted in 2012, and had hearings beginning Jan 14 up until September 2013.

It heard 211 witnesses before the findings of the commission were submitted to the federal government in May this year.

Former Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Steve Shim headed the five-person panel which heard testimonies from the witnesses, which included former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

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