

Najib slammed for slashing Suhakam's budget by half
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The dramatic budget cut of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) is proof that the government lacks political will to empower Suhakam, said Suaram executive director Sevan Doraisamy.

"The Malaysian government cannot in good conscience claim that they hold human rights and civil liberties in high regards when it is not reflected in the budget allocation for Suhakam," he said in a statement today.

Suhakam's budget allocation has been slashed from slightly over RM10 million this year to RM5.5 million for 2016.

This is almost a 50 percent cut in budget, Doraisamy said, which would make it difficult for Suhakam to conduct its daily operation and public campaigns.

He urged the government to review the budget allocation for Suhakam and to provide it with more powers in a manner that reflects its status as a national human rights institution.

If the government does not do so, Suhakam would have failed to comply with the Paris Principles, Doraisamy said.

This, he explained, would eventually lead to a downgrade of the human rights commission from its current 'A' status by the Paris Principles.

The Paris Principles are a list of stipulations for national human rights institutions that were adopted by the United Nations.

"This downgrade would only add to the ever growing list of human rights violations by the Malaysian government and further shame Malaysia in its commitment to uphold human rights and democracy," lamented Doraisamy.

Human rights low priority for gov't?

Proham has also called the Suhakam budget cut unacceptable, with its secretary-general Denison Jayasooria saying that this implies the government does not prioritise human rights issues.

"This is unacceptable and could be construed as giving human rights work low priority by the federal government," he said in a statement today.

The government needs to ensure that Suhakam is adequately funded to carry out its duties, said Jayasooria.

Proham is an organisation formed by former commissioners of Suhakam.

There is a clause in the Suhakam Act, Jayasooria added, that reads "the government shall provide the commission with adequate funds annually to enable the commission to discharge its functions under this Act".

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who is also finance minister, must realise that RM10 million annual budget for Suhakam this year is already relatively small compared to the expenditures of other sectors of the federal government, Jayasooria said.

"Therefore, as a clear mark of commitment to human rights in Malaysian society, the government is urged to restore Suhakam to its full allocation as previous years," he said.

Suhakam has also said they will question the government over their budget cut allocation for next year, with its chairperson Hasmy Agam saying this would mean that some of their planned programmes cannot be executed.

"We are obviously very concerned about the drastic budget cut as it will adversely affect our planned programmes and activities.

"We will be taking up the matter with the government as early as tomorrow. We will keep the public informed of developments on the matter," he was reported as saying by *The Malaysian Insider*.

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