

LETTER | Undi18: We're not criminals, only asking for right to vote

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Elisa Shafiqah Shahrilnizam

LETTER | On April 2, 18 youths and community leaders filed a judicial review over the actions taken by the government over the irrational delay in implementing the Undi18 bill. Mixed responses and debates arose all over social media on the bold move made by the applicants.

In light of recent developments over the bill's implementation, Election Commission (EC) chairperson Abdul Ghani Salleh said both amendments to the Federal Constitution will only be implemented after Sept 1, 2022 due to difficulties during the pandemic.

The amendments include lowering the voting age to 18 and for automatic voter registration.

The bill was passed by Parliament in 2019, meaning to say it has been approximately two years of the EC not progressing with implementing the

system to allow those 18 years old and above to vote.

Do note both amendments do not have to be at the same time. This is one argument by the applicants who seek a court order to declare such interpretation unreasonable.

A few years before the founding of the non-profit and bipartisan Undi18 group, various forms of engagement were made to raise political awareness in physical workshops, convening a simulation of Parliament digitally, and roundtable sessions.

This has shown that, on our level, we have done our best to raise awareness among potential voters to truly grasp the idea as well as engage in dialogues with the relevant ministries.

It is now the time for us to pass the baton to the ministries to educate the citizens as they have more resources. But the decision presented by the EC quashes the hope of millions of youth to take part in the democratic process.

If the court favours the requests sought by the 18 applicants, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin can issue an executive order to allow those 18 and above to vote in accordance with Article 119 Section 3(a) of the Federal Constitution for

the EC to implement.

Thus, the rule of law will be upheld and millions of youths will be able to participate in the most accessible way possible to select those worthy of our votes to build a better Malaysia than before.

On the other hand, what happens if things were to go south? This means the actions by the government truly amounts to voter suppression and worse, the youths will remember these very days when the government took away our liberties to contribute and improve the country.

This means, not only the 18 applicants, but millions of youths have to just sit back and have no say towards matters that affect them the most - welfare, accessibility, representation, education, and to a certain extent better structural reforms to inculcate a progressive country in the next few years.

This means we have no control over what lies ahead for us but at the same time, we are to be blamed by the elderly for not making changes. Hence, we won't be backing down, especially now. Not only are we the 18 applicants, but we are millions of potential voters who will continue calling out and pressuring the government to implement Undi18 and restore our rights.

The issue of maturity is irrelevant as youths from 18 to 20 carry the same weight of responsibilities as young adults who are working or studying. So those aged 18 to 20 from every part of the country, in the city or countryside, should be eligible to vote.

Ironically, 18-year-olds are deemed as adults by the law. They can legally run for office. Some have to pay income tax if they are already working, some are interning in high-position roles such as in state assemblyperson and MP offices, some even have to work multiple jobs to sustain their family. So the question remains, why are we denied the right to vote?

Dear government, why are the 18- to 20-year-olds treated as if we are criminals? This is the bare minimum, we are only requesting our rights to vote. Have you noticed once a person turns 21, do we deny their rights to vote? Do we say they are not worthy of such a vote? The answer is no, because they deserve it. They have contributed to the country in various means.

Aren't we, the 18- to 20-year-olds, the same? We are contributing to the nation by casting a vote on what is deemed the best for the national interest, what is best to elevate our communities, and what is best to solve systemic issues that we have yet to address to achieve unity. Denying our rights now will only cost you seats in the future.

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