

**A new charter for labour**  
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**Terence Netto**

Parti Keadilan Rakyat advisor Anwar Ibrahim today called for a "new charter for labour" that takes heed of globalisation and increased world trade but at the same time protects workers' rights to free association and decent wages.

In a May Day message to workers, Anwar said while he acknowledged that globalisation and the resultant changes to world trade had subtracted from the power of unions, certain rights of workers are "inalienable and enduringly so".

"The right of workers to free association which is the right to form a union must be inviolable and the right to a fair wage for decent work must also be recognised," said the former finance minister who has become the titular leader of the Malaysian opposition.

Anwar said in important sectors of the Malaysian economy, both the right to form a union and the right to decent wages were not part of the landscape of employer-worker relations.

"This is blot on the nation - that after 50 years of Merdeka, there are still workers who are prevented from being part of a union and are struggling to earn a livable wage," he lamented.

He said Keadilan remained committed to a minimum wage and his party would bring every channel of moral suasion to bear on employers and management so that the later would not bust unions and would pay a livable wage.

"Our new charter for labour would recognise their basic rights to free association and a decent wage without recourse to legislation," he said.

"The power of the state to exert influence without recourse to legislation is enormous and PKR would use this moral capital to support workers' basic rights to free association and decent wages."

## **Housing rights**

He said a concomitant right was decent affordable housing which he maintained was the government's duty to provide to citizens.

"The provision of decent housing must be high on the list of priorities of a government that is sensitive to the people's needs," he said.

"The housing sector should not solely regarded as an engine of growth for the economy. There must be a social responsibility dimension to housing provision and both government and the private sector must recognise this."

Anwar said that as part of PKR's new charter for labour, the Employees' Provident Fund should pay an annual dividend that is not less than eight per cent to contributors.

He also said that the new charter would also mandate the paying of a cost of living allowance to private sector employees if such allowance is paid to public sector ones.

"Equivalence is necessary whenever there are such exigencies as fuel price and toll hikes which are burdensome to the common folk," he said.

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