

**MCA, MIC welcomes notice-to-convert requirement**  
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MCA today welcomed the move announced by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday to set a new requirement for Muslim converts to declare their religious status to their family members. MCPX

ong ka ting and mca "MCA's stand has been consistent in pushing for such move. However, we would like to seek for clarification on the process of implementation of such a requirement," said party president Ong Ka Ting in a statement.

"There should be a time period for the new convert to inform their family members on their new religion so to ensure fairness to the family members and to avoid any disputes at a further stage," he added.

"At the same time, there must be a transparent process and procedure to ensure that those converted due to marriage or are of a minor age, be allowed to leave the religion without hindrances."

"The court also must not allow the unilateral conversion of any minor children resulting from the civil marriage as the federal constitution clearly states that it must be done with consent of "ibu bapa".

"The court should not view this as a loophole as the religion of the child should remain status quo until he/she attains the age of majority," he said.

He added that his party would like to see that the government take immediate steps to make the necessary amendments to the relevant laws in order that the freedom of religion was upheld.

**Samy: A major relieve**

MIC president S Samy Vellu also welcomed the decision.

samy vellu pc 120308 agitated "We consider this decision as a major relieve, particularly to my community. This is because there have been instances where a Hindu-born husband will convert to Islam without the knowledge of his wife for reasons only known to him, and his action becomes a major setback for his wife and her children. This latest decision will put a stop to such practices," he said in a statement.

"This issue of non-Muslim converting to Islam without the knowledge of their families was discussed long ago but now, there has been a permanent decision. The question now is what kind of laws or regulations will be imposed to ensure that it is strictly adhered to by the parties concerned," he added

Samy Vellu urged the government to consult with the relevant parties, including MIC as to how it could be implemented.

He said the laws should also take into account the fate of the children should the father or mother converts to Islam.

"If need be, existing laws, some which may be outdated, need to be amended without hurting the sensitivity of any race or religion.

"There should be transparency and commitment on the part of the authorities to make the changes as clearly indicated by the prime minister's decision. I wish to thank the prime minister for making this timely announcement," he added.

### **A positive step**

A leading inter-religious council also similarly welcomed Abdullah's announcement yesterday of a requirement for non-Muslims wishing to convert to Islam to inform their families first.

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taosim today said that this was a positive step in resolving any abuses and heartaches for the non-Muslim family members.

mccbchst multi religious group candle light vigil pc 190607 a vaithilingam "This is a positive first step in ensuring that our laws and system of administration are not abused by those wanting to avoid their obligations to their loved ones by converting to Islam," said the council's president A Vaithilingam in a statement today.

He also added that the new requirement would encourage state Islamic authorities to ensure that converts to Islam notify their immediate families before they convert.

However, he stressed that, there must be definite document to prove that the immediate families, especially the parents or spouse, have been notified.

"We hope that, among other things, this will end the unseemly and heart wrenching disputes during times of bereavement," he added.

He said that the council had previously given comprehensive memoranda detailing the other necessary reforms necessary to ensure the law was crystal clear, and fair to all parties.

He added that the council was ready and willing to assist the government to find a solution to these problems.

### **'We don't want problems'**

Yesterday Abdullah said that the government would soon introduce a regulation requiring non-Muslims wishing to convert to Islam to inform their family before doing so.

He said that this would prevent problems of families disputing the conversion of their loved ones when they die.

He suggested that non-Muslims who intend to convert have a form or letter declaring that their families had been told and had understood his or her decision.

"We don't want problems later when the man converts and converts the children also, when the wife has rights too," he was reported as saying, adding that withholding such information from the family would pose a problem to religious authorities performing their

duties.

In recent years a series of legal battles between Muslims and non-Muslims came into prominence, especially in matters involving legal and family rights of the non-Muslim spouse or the fight over the body of a converted person between the Islamic authorities and the non-Muslim family.

### **Protect all rights on non-Muslim parties**

Another movement which welcomed the announcement, the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), said that it was concerned over several rights affecting the non-Muslims parties although it fully supports the right of the party converting into Islam.

"We are concerned where the exercise of that right impinges upon the rights of that individual's family and where such an impingement has a retrogressive effect, leaving family members with fewer rights and thus worse off than before," said the action group in a statement today.

JAG is especially concerned about the following specific rights:

1. The right of married non-Muslim women to continue to rely on the rights and obligations contained in a civil law marriage agreement when their spouses convert to Islam;
2. The right to have all issues relating to a civil law marriage settled according to civil laws and adjudicated only in civil courts;
3. The right to petition for divorce on the basis that conversion to Islam has led to a breakdown of her marriage;
4. Upon divorce, the right to receive maintenance, for herself and her children, as provided for in the civil laws;
5. The equal right, as a parent, to decide on matters relating to her children's upbringing;
6. The continued right to inherit from a family member who converts to Islam; and
7. The right to be informed of her spouse's conversion to Islam.

JAG said that the law must be reformed, where necessary, to ensure that when an individual embraces Islam, the convert's spouse (or ex-spouse), children and other family members' rights and entitlements under civil laws remain unchanged.

"Regardless of such conversion, all issues arising out of the marriage must be settled according to civil law, and not state Islamic law enactments, since the marriage was solemnized or registered under civil law," it added.

To do that, the action group said, legislation must be adopted to specify that only the civil courts have jurisdiction to hear any matter arising out of such a marriage, including jurisdiction over the converting spouse.

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