



**Walk the talk on human rights, Najib told
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A New York-based human rights watchdog is disappointed that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has failed to respect the fundamental rights of Malaysians despite earlier hints at improvement.

The World Report 2010 by Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that the Malaysian government has continued to harass the political opposition, imposed improper restrictions on the rights to peaceful expression, association and assembly, and mistreated migrants.

In a statement today, Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at HRW, criticised the Malaysian government for "pursuing short-term political advantage (rather than safeguarding rights."

According to the organisation, the release of all but nine detainees held under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in Najib's early days was "a positive development".

Unjustified censorship, sedition charges

However, the report said the PM's promise to amend the repressive law were dashed at the anti-ISA protest last August, when security forces used tear gas and water-laced chemicals on civilians, and arrested almost 600 people including 44 children.

HRW also urged Malaysia to respect the freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

The report said unjustified cases of censorship and charges of sedition are contradictory to Najib's earlier proclamation for a media that can "responsibly report what they see, without fear of consequence".

With regards to the treatment of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, Malaysia showed mostly negative results, despite meeting "a long-sought goal by guaranteeing a day off a week" for domestic workers.

The report condemned the inadequate protection of labour rights, unlawful arrests of migrants and inhumane conditions in immigration detention centers.

"How many more migrants have to die in detention before Malaysian policymakers wake up?" asked Robertson.

'Bizarre sodomy law, abolish Rela'

The annual review of human rights practices worldwide also mentioned that it is "bizarre" for Malaysia to enforce "an antiquated British colonial law against sodomy by consenting adults," referring to current charges against Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim.

As such, HRW issued a clarion call for the protection of human rights defenders including outspoken members of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), which it says continues to "(lack) adequate independence."



Among the recommendations made by the 2010 report are that the Malaysian government revoke the ISA, rescind the Printing Presses and Publications Act to narrow the definition of sedition, and amend the Police Act to provide for "reasonable and negotiated conditions for assembly."

It also repeated calls to abolish Rela, the People's Volunteer Corps, and uphold the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as ratify key international treaties. Robertson also called on Najib to live up to his promises of protecting human rights in Malaysia.

"If the government really believes in its 1Malaysia campaign, then it should demonstrate real commitment to improving respect for the human rights of all Malaysians," he concluded.

- *Bernama*

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