

**The Malaysian Bar Welcomes Prime Minister's Announcements On Electoral Reforms And
Censorship Laws Review
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The Malaysian Bar welcomes the recent announcement by the Prime Minister for the establishment of a parliamentary select committee, which will discuss electoral reforms. The Malaysian Bar also welcomes the Prime Minister's promise of a review of censorship laws. The Bar hopes that these announcements will translate into real action with real changes soon.

The rakyat has grown weary of unfulfilled promises. The Prime Minister's announcements are welcome recognition that this discontent can no longer be ignored.

However, the government need not wait until after the parliamentary select committee has reported before considering electoral reforms. SUHAKAM in 2007 published its recommendations of electoral reform, amongst which include equal access to the media, longer campaign period and automatic registration of eligible voters.

These recommendations are so trite that no right thinking Malaysian would argue against any of them, and should have been debated in Parliament in 2007 or 2008. Had this been done, electoral reforms could have been implemented earlier. The Bar urges the government to take SUHAKAM and its work more seriously and give its reports the time and thought they deserve.

The Malaysian Bar also supports the call by Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah to introduce automatic registration of voters and to lower the minimum voting age from the present 21 to 18.

The right to vote is a reflection of the maturity, social awareness and sense of responsibility of the individual, and in law, when a child reaches the age of majority; the individual is legally regarded as an adult, responsible for his or her own actions. For such a person to be disenfranchised is incomprehensible.

A lower minimum voting age also engages the young of our nation in the political process. It is patronising and hypocritical to say that our young people should concentrate on their education and not be involved in any political activity/process, when those who are studying abroad or young people of other nations can do so.

The Malaysian Bar further applauds the Prime Minister's acknowledgment of the futility of censorship and his promise of reform, and hopes that the government will heed the voice of the rakyat, calling out for action to uphold and promote the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression, rather than seeking to repress and suppress any speech that is not approved of.

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