

## **The Shackling Of Prof Abdul Aziz Bari And Academic Freedom**

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**Aliran Executive Committee**

Aliran is outraged by the reported suspension of the constitutional law expert, Professor Abdul Aziz Bari, of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM).

His suspension comes in the wake of his publicly expressed opinion regarding the recent decree by the Sultan of Selangor over the controversial Jais raid on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church.

Many Malaysians share his opinion and look up to him as a brave academic who did not betray his conscience in expressing an honest opinion without fear or favour. This intellectual freedom of expression must be the hallmark of an institution of higher learning. It is rare individuals like him who inspire students to speak the truth and defend what is right. He is an asset to IIUM.

The action taken by the university against the learned professor is baffling. The university is guilty of committing a serious travesty of justice as its action amounts to a denial of the right of academics to offer their expert opinions on matters that they specialises in and are concerned about.

It is expected of the professor to share his knowledge and expertise with the rest of us. That is the primary purpose in recruiting the best lecturers to teach and mould our youngsters to be responsible citizens.

If anyone disagrees with his view, he or she should do it intellectually and in a civilised manner to enhance an understanding of the issue at hand for both the academic fraternity and the larger community. A sledgehammer such as the Sedition Act should not be used to suppress healthy discussion.

It has not been proven that his views are invalid and without merit. Malaysians should be told why his views are wrong. We should indeed start a debate to discuss this issue in a civilised manner as befitting a civil society.

Equally important, the university's action makes a mockery of the notion of intellectual freedom and integrity that a university worth its salt is supposed to promote and protect. If this important value is not protected and guarded, what is the worth of a university?

Besides, the measure of an intellectually vibrant institution of higher learning is recognised and honoured when there are open discussions, debates and dissenting opinions. The prevalence of a lacklustre follow-me mentality – symptomatic of the larger political and feudalistic culture – will be the death knell of a university.

Aliran calls upon the IIUM authorities to lift the professor's suspension immediately and cease all other similar actions that would only smear and sully the university's academic reputation.

**ALIRAN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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