

**Court Of Appeal Landmark Ruling On UUCA Breaks Free Another Chain Of Repression Of Freedom Movement**

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**By Fadhiah Nadwa Fikri - Lawyers For Liberty**

The Court of Appeal on Monday ruled that section 15(5)(a) of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA) is in breach of Article 10 of the Federal Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression.

Section 15(5)(a) of UUCA prohibits students from expressing their support, sympathy or opposition to any political party and in breach of this section, universities have the power to take disciplinary action against the students.

Lawyers For Liberty applauds the decisiveness of the Court of Appeal ruling in upholding the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression against the prohibition under section 15(5)(a) which impedes students' participation in political activities.

This ruling reaffirms the right to political participation which is crystalized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which have been the cornerstone of the constitutional provisions in many countries.

The right to political participation is central to the practice of democracy. It is pivotal to note that the right to political participation is to be enjoyed without discrimination.

The Court of Appeal ruling is timely following the recent suspension of Law Professor Abdul Aziz Bari which is clearly in violation of academic freedom, free speech and expression.

UUCA was deliberately amended in 1975 to restrict the student movement in political activities following the infamous Baling Demonstration which witnessed 30,000 people including students standing up for the poor farmers in Kedah, demanding for fair rubber prices and better living conditions.

This unprecedented decision by the Court of Appeal underscores the most significant aspect of the duty of the court as the final bastion of justice to warn the government against continuing repressive action which is an affront to constitutional guarantee of free speech and expression.

**FADIAH NADWA FIKRI - LAWYERS FOR LIBERTY**

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