

If Malaysia Wants To Be Respected As A Democracy, It Must Stop Persecuting Sexual Minorities

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The Malaysian Bar welcomes the statement by Prime Minister Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak ("PM Najib Razak") that he is the Prime Minister of "a progressive, liberal nation". Writing in an opinion piece published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 27 October 2011, PM Najib Razak went on to state that, "We are a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society that has a long and proud history of social harmony and welcoming outsiders."

In Malaysia, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ("LGBT") community has long been treated as "outsiders", even though they are citizens. Members of the LGBT community in Malaysia face numerous hardships, including a lack of personal safety due to harassment by civil and Syariah authorities, living in fear of prosecution for the private acts of consenting adults, and constantly facing public discrimination and denigration. They are perennially at the receiving end of negative innuendo and hate speech in the mainstream media, which is seemingly tolerated by the authorities.

The Malaysian Bar encourages PM Najib Razak to follow up on his words that Malaysia is a "progressive, liberal nation" and to alleviate the suffering of members of the LGBT community in Malaysia. He can do so by quickly introducing laws to remove legislation that impose unwarranted restrictions on the individual liberties of the LGBT community in Malaysia.

From 1-13 Nov 2011, the Malaysian Bar is proud once again to support the annual Seksualiti Merdeka series of events, with this year's theme of "Queer Without Fear". We recognise the LGBT community in Malaysia as one facing persecution on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. No doubt there are those amongst us who do not agree with the sexual orientations and gender identities of the LGBT community's members. But it is precisely because of this that sexual minorities, and indeed other minority communities, need to be protected. Individual freedoms and liberties mean very little if they are only extended selectively, or to those who agree with the majority view.

PM Najib Razak wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald that "Malaysia is not some repressive, backward nation that persecutes refugees and asylum seekers." The Malaysian Bar calls on PM Najib Razak to apply the same thinking with respect to the LGBT community in Malaysia. If PM Najib Razak seriously wishes to convince his audience in Australia – and elsewhere in the Commonwealth and the world at large – that Malaysia is a "progressive, liberal nation", he must act immediately to end repression, persecution and prosecution of sexual minorities in Malaysia.

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