

UUCA Amendments Are Severely Inadequate
MalaysianMirror.com
24 April 2012
By Tony Pua

A student from Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP) has been slapped with a 66-day academic suspension and RM100 fine for supposedly organising a programme to raise awareness of voting, allegedly linked with pro-opposition groups.

Mohd Zaini Izuwan, 25, said he was accused for organising the program at a restaurant in Kangar on Jan 13 which involved 14 student groups from Perlis, Kedah and Penang. The program, named 'Watch 13', is an initiative by the student coalition to raise public awareness of the importance of voting in the coming general election.

Mohd Zaini has protested his innocence that he was at the event as an observer and not an organiser. He also complained that he was not allowed to bring any witnesses or to question the "prosecution" witnesses during the disciplinary hearing.

The above incident reported on 21 April, just 2 days after the Universities and University Colleges Act 1972 was "amended" to give students greater freedom proves beyond doubt the lack of genuine intent at reform by the Barisan Nasional government. It also exposed how the amendments fell far short of what is required to give Malaysians students the necessary room to express themselves freely.

While the new Amendment Bill has taken the step forward by allowing students to join political parties, the new Act will still give absolute discretion to the University authorities to determine activities and societies deemed "detrimental" to the interest of the institution.

For example, Clause 15(2)(b) the amended UUCA Bill says explicitly that university students will not be allowed to join any organisations, societies or groups of persons (with the exception of political parties) deemed inappropriate by the University Board.

In addition, Clause 15(4)(b) also allows the university to deny the rights of its students to speak, even on his or her subject of study, in any symposium or seminar organised by any organisation or person(s) deemed inappropriate by the University.

I had moved a motion to make the relevant amendments to the above clauses in Parliament but was rejected by the Minister of Higher Education and the Barisan Nasional Members of Parliament. The Minister had given an assurance that the new amendments will not be abused and that the Universities are sufficiently enlightened to use their discretions over the above matters.

However, as shown clearly over the above unjustified actions of UNIMAP, even if Mohd Zaini had indeed organised the event to "raise public awareness of the importance of voting" – which he has denied, the new amendments fell far short of granting academic and political freedom to the university students.

We call upon Khaled Nordin to reprimand the UNIMAP authorities for taking such harsh and unjustified actions against a student of the university who did not commit any wrong against the institution. At the same time, we call upon the Minister to immediately lift Mohd Zaini's suspension to prove that he was sincere in his objective to make Malaysian universities premier institutions of holistic learning and not centres for thought imprisonment.

TONY PUA

(The views expressed above belongs to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)

Copyright © 2012 www.malaysianmirror.com
<http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/57456>