

**'I Will Defend Their Rights' - Saifuddin
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 22 (Bernama) -- Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah will defend the rights of students although they had urged him to step down through a memorandum sent to him, yesterday.

Saifuddin, who declined to comment further on the call for him to step down in the memorandum, left it to the people to evaluate the matter.

"In my opinion they have a right to gather and speak out. I was also informed that some who attended were students. To them, I would like to state that my love for them does not change," he said in a statement which was distributed in Parliament Thursday.

According to Saifuddin, yesterday, he was informed by ministry officials that about 350 people had a peaceful gathering in the compound of the Higher Education Ministry.

However, he was then attending a programme in Batu Pahat, Johor and Seremban, Negeri Sembilan.

Senior Private secretary Mohd Nazri Noh who represented him had received the memorandum and also invited the group to meet in Parliament this afternoon but this was rejected.

In fact, he said, when attending a debate programme at Universiti Putra Malaysia last night, he also had met Aspirasi Alumni president Mohd Shahar Abdullah, and several of his friends and they also handed him a memorandum.

"The brief meeting took place in a cordial atmosphere and we shook hands with smiles on our faces," he said.

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