

**Himpun to meet Cabinet interfaith panel tonight**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By G. Manimaran**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 — Organisers of this Saturday's Himpun rally, a gathering to protest against Christians "challenging the sovereignty" of Islam, will explain their motives to the Cabinet's interfaith panel at a meeting tonight.

Himpun secretariat secretary Aminuddin Yahaya told The Malaysian Insider the purpose of the meeting was to clear any misunderstanding and misconception over the rally's objectives.

He stressed that the rally, expected to be the country's largest gathering of Muslims nationwide, was specifically aimed at discussing the contentious issue of proselytisation and to unite those of the same faith.

"Therefore, we will send our representatives from the secretariat to explain to the committee's non-Muslim members why this effort is being taken... several secretariat leaders also sit on that inter-religious panel," he said when met last night.

Aminuddin was referring to the Cabinet's Special Committee to Promote Inter-religious Understanding and Harmony, headed by National Unity and Integration Department (NUID) director-general Datuk Azman Amin Hassan (picture).

The committee was formed by the Cabinet last February after several incidents like the Allah controversy and the attacks on houses of worships threatened religious understanding and harmony in Malaysia.

Himpun or Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Gathering of a Million Faithful), scheduled for this Saturday at the Shah Alam stadium, is being organised by various right-wing groups such as Perkasa with the backing of both Umno and PAS Youth in what appears to be a coming together of conservative Muslims.

Already, over 1,000 Facebook users have confirmed their attendance so far and talk is that some 100,000 will throng the stadium, including Muslim political leaders across the divide.

Aminuddin said more than 2,000 NGOs, representing some four million Muslims in Malaysia, have already expressed their support for the rally.

With ethnic tensions already rising in the years following the 2008 general election, the mass gathering could raise already simmering fears of Islamisation among non-Muslims and more liberal Malays.

The mass gathering is expected to produce a declaration urging the government to enact special laws allowing punishment of individuals found guilty of proselytising to Muslims.

In a statement last night, the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) however said there were no official figures on the number of proselytisation cases in the country and expressed worry that the gathering would place Islam in a negative light.

Selangor PAS said yesterday it would not back the gathering if it was political in nature and aimed to create animosity between those of different faiths.

Aminuddin however dismissed the concerns, stressing that Himpun only aims to defend the Islamic faith and had nothing to do with politics.

"We would like to stress that this effort is not to incite any sentiments against the other religions or threaten or instil fear in them... no, that is what we would like to stress here. It also has nothing to do with politics, it is far from any political influence," he said.

Aminuddin also welcomed non-Muslims to participate in the gathering, saying it would be an opportunity for the group to understand the rally's objectives. He expressed hope the non-Muslims would not misunderstand Himpun's purpose.

He said although Islam was protected in the Federal Constitution, there were still many parties who often attempt to convert Muslims and threaten the Islamic faith.

He admitted the idea to organise the gathering was mooted after the controversial Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) incident in Petaling Jaya on August 3.

"Although it was just one case, we view it as a serious one, clearly spreading Christian propaganda before Muslims... so we want to send a message that this should be stopped, Islam should not be threatened," he said.

He pointed out that such issues should have been resolved by the Cabinet's interfaith panel.

"But we are not blaming all Christians... only a group of them... there are those who respect and understand (Islam)," he said, adding that Himpun would soon be made into a formal secretariat to monitor proselytisation in Malaysia.

Apart from discussing proselytisation, Himpun's objectives also include measuring the level of unity among Muslims after the DUMC raid, to highlight the royal institution's role as the head of Islam, and to explain the role of Islam in the Constitution.

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