

Set up third economic council, Proham tells Putrajaya
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 30 — The federal government should form a third economic consultative council to review the progress of all communities and look at the national agenda beyond 2020, a local human rights watchdog said today.

The Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham) said this was needed so that no ethnic group is left behind, adding that the last such council was in 1999 to 2000.

“Proham notes that there are major concerns over income inequalities and disparities at the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic levels especially between the top 20 per cent and the bottom 40 per cent,” it said in a statement today.

It said many affirmative action programmes had in the past benefitted only certain sections of society, namely the “elites”.

The association added that the government needed to break down the large economic gap now before the situation worsened.

The rights watchdog noted certain groups were now pushing for what it described as “unreasonable race-based affirmative policies” to be continued while claiming that failure to do so will result in ethnic clashes and riots.

Yesterday, right-wing Malay movement Perkasa insisted a 30 per cent share for Bumiputeras must stay while saying it supported affirmative action policies for all races.

Former prime minister and Perkasa patron Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has also consistently been seen to lobby the Najib administration to maintain the pro-Bumiputera quota policies.

Proham also pointed out that “cash hand out” programmes to address poverty were one-off measures and unsustainable as they contrasted with long-term projects that built on self-reliance and self-help.

“These funds could be better utilised in socio-economic assistance to the real poor through better targeting and capability building,” it said and urged the government to review its cash hand-outs,

It also called on Putrajaya to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and to adopt the UN Human Rights Approach To Poverty Eradication.

Proham said the two international documents already provided for affirmative action that was needs-based and focused on resources for the poor and low-income and were consistent with human rights.

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