

## **EC Needs To Improve Voting Facilities For The Handicapped**

**Bernama**

**March 24, 2012**

**By Fadzli Ramli**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- The Election Commission (EC) needs to improve voting facilities for the handicapped in the 13th general election to ensure that they could cast their ballots properly.

The president of the Malaysian Council of the Federation of the Handicapped Associations Datuk Mah Hassan Omar (rpt:Mah) said that as Malaysians, the handicapped too had the same voting rights as normal Malaysian citizens.

"If the facilities provided are inadequate, the rights of the handicapped to vote as Malaysian citizens would be would be obstructed in view of our limitations," he said when contacted by Bernama.

Mah Hassan, who has impaired vision, said there were three major improvements that were needed. Firstly, the provision of polling centres that must be upgraded so that they would be handicapped-friendly.

"The Polling centres, usually at the schools and community halls, must have several facilities such as the ramp for those on wheelchairs or using walking sticks, and shorter routes for the handicapped to go to their polling streams," he said.

The second improvement, he said, involved facilities for the blind where they needed a better way to mark their ballot papers.

"Of course we can bring a close relative to help in crossing the ballot paper, but apart from the voter's children, wife or husband, the sincerity of those accompanying the blind could be questioned.

"The best way is to provide ballot papers that could be read by the blind such as using braille writing or embossed images," he said.

The third improvement was to give the mandate to the council and its affiliated members to channel voting information to the handicapped nationwide.

"We want to help the EC and the handicapped themselves in channelling the information such as the voting place because the handicapped has limited mobility. If they go to the wrong voting place during the 13th general election, it would be difficult for them to go the actual voting place," he said.

Meanwhile, Beautiful Gate Foundation For The Disabled executive director Sia Siew Chin said SPR officers should be trained comprehensively on how to assist and provide for voters with various disabilities.

Being on a wheelchair herself, (NOTE: she is paralyzed from the hip down) Sia said it is recommended arrangements are made for the disabled voters to be at locations where

there are no steps, no thick grass and no gutter separating the voting place.

"Deaf voters cannot hear when called by their names to give their vote in the voting booth. Consequently, they miss their turn to vote because they were considered absent. This is some of the many feedback we received," she said.

Sia said campaign topics were communicated through the printed media and the electronic media like TV and radio, but they were not accessible to persons who are deaf or blind to know what both political sides have to offer.

She said many persons with severe physically disabilities and those who are classified as having medium or severe intellectual disabilities are not registered as voters. (NOTE: intellectual disabilities can vote, mental disabilities can't).

"There needs to be more awareness-raising efforts on the importance of ensuring all citizens can access their right to vote and in particular the right of persons with disabilities to vote. Also there must be a statistic on the disabled voters.

"These efforts must take place at the national level to encourage a change in attitude and hopefully this will ensure that families are assisting their family members with disabilities in the voter registration process," she said.

---BERNAMA

Copyright © 2012 BERNAMA

Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsindex.php?id=654564>