

**Our Envoy Hits Out At Aussie MPs For Negative Portrayal Of Malaysia**  
**Bernama**  
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**By Neville D'Cruz**

MELBOURNE, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia Datuk Salman Ahmad has strongly criticised certain Australian members of parliament over their "negative portrayal" of Malaysia in connection with the people-swap plan.

"We see it as unfair that this democratic debate has been undertaken at the expense of Malaysia's good reputation and its solid values," he said in a letter to Australian parliamentarians which was sent to Bernama on Monday, after its contents were leaked to the Australian media.

Salman said he was "very concerned with the sustained negative portrayal of my country in the Parliament, which has extended to the media and the general public".

"While it is truly understandable that all sides of the Parliament want to employ the most effective policy for the country to protect its borders against illegal arrivals, its action in bringing down and tarnishing the good name of another country is uncalled for," he said.

He said Malaysia had entered into the arrangement for the people swap with the sincere intention of combating "the heinous crimes" of people smuggling and trafficking which was consistent with agreed regional processes.

The arrangement was also decided after extensive consultations with the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration, he said, adding that the organisations would be vigorously involved in providing necessary support and operational assistance in implementing the arrangement.

Under the asylum seeker swap plan, Australia would send 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia and in return, take in several thousand refugees aimed at deterring illegal boat arrivals.

It was struck down by the Australian High Court, and the government has not been able to win sufficient parliamentary numbers to get it through.

The opposition has strongly condemned the Malaysia deal on the grounds that people's human rights would not be protected, pointing to Malaysia's refusal to sign the refugee convention.

Salman said Malaysia's co-operation with the UNHCR in resettling refugees to a third country went back a long way. He pointed to Malaysia's record in handling the Vietnamese boat people as "a clear testimony of our sincere commitments to solving the refugee problem".

"Today, there are more than 99,000 people of concern, which the UNHRC categorises as refugees and asylum seekers, in Malaysia. In addition, Malaysia has to deal with about 1,303,126 illegal foreign workers," he said.

He said Malaysia advocated a regional solution in tackling people-smuggling issues.

Salman said, the fact that Malaysia had not signed the refugee convention, should not be viewed as a deterrent to "the forging of an innovative and strategic regional partnership with the aim to effectively address these crimes".

"However, we feel that the political rhetoric and the negative portrayal of Malaysia will undermine the positive aspects of our relationship and diminishes the good work we have achieved, thus far, in our collective efforts to combat this undignified and illegitimate industry."

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