

**Christian-Muslim dialogue in Penang goes on smoothly, even protesters attend**  
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**BY ELIZABETH ZACHARIAH**

Despite many challenges, a Christian-Muslim dialogue at a church in Penang last night went on smoothly amid heavy presence of policemen.

Even the protesters who were against it attended the two-hour session at St. Mark's Church to listen to what was being discussed.

The dialogue was organised by PAS's Parit Buntar Member of Parliament Datuk Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa (pic) and the party's Tasik Gelugor information chief Abdul Rahman Kasim, and Reverend John Kennedy from the Anglican church.

On Saturday, several non-governmental organisations held a protest at George Town's Speakers' Square to oppose the programme. A police report was also lodged against Mujahid for organising the dialogue.

Mujahid said today that he was accused of not having the expertise to organise the session and was also told that he does not represent the Muslim community.

"But that is their view. What I was most disappointed with was that there was still opposition to the dialogue right until the last minute," he lamented.

Certain quarters had even insisted that Mujahid get the consent from the Conference of Rulers before holding the dialogue.

"There was so much pressure for us to cancel the dialogue. The venue was changed from the church to a restaurant but we were told to leave as protesters had gathered outside there as well."

The dialogue was then moved back to the church in Butterworth where at least 60 people joined the session hosted by Kennedy.

Mujahid said members of the NGOs who protested earlier and several police officers also joined in.

Mujahid said the dialogue was on fostering unity and peace among the different faiths.

"We did not discuss theological differences or any other argument but simply about what can be done to heal relationships," he added.

He said such dialogues will continue whatever the outcome of the court decision on the use of the term "Allah" by Christians.

"We are not here to sell the Muslim faith nor buy the faith of others," said the second-term PAS MP.

Despite calls by some groups to seek permission from the Rulers, Mujahid said the organisers will not bow down to pressure.

"This is just an effort by a citizen and an MP to foster unity among the two religions. I don't know what's wrong with that.

"My team will continue these efforts," he stressed.

Mujahid said he has visited at least 30 churches nationwide, and has been holding similar dialogues in the last two years in the wake of the dispute on the word "Allah".

"Suddenly my credibility is being questioned. Suddenly I am not an expert?" asked the outspoken politician.

Saying it was up to his critics to decide about him, Mujahid said fostering peace between Christians and Muslims is crucial.

Meanwhile, Malaysiakini quoted Catholic Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing as praising Mujahid for his efforts, calling him "truly, a plenipotentiary of peace".

"I'm truly heartened by his steadfastness of purpose in forging a dialogue between Muslims and Christians," he said.

Tan also lauded the organisers of the dialogue, saying it was "far and away the best Malaysia Day present people of goodwill in this country could hope to get in our fraught circumstances".

"Just look at what a few people of peace and goodwill can achieve when they decide to brave adverse circumstances to hold a dialogue that seeks to build bridges between communities.

"Truly, this episode on a day of commemorative significance to us as a nation, is a sign of God's providence. Genuine dialogue makes us true human beings," said Tan.

He pointed out that the Catholic church teaches the importance of dialogues with people of different faiths, ethnic groups and political affiliations.

"Let all understand that genuine dialogue makes us true human beings," the bishop added.  
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