

## **Election Commission notes GE13 complaints at Bersih tribunal, wants to work together**

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**BY JENNIFER GOMEZ**

The Election Commission (EC) has noted every complaint raised at the Bersih People's Tribunal investigating the May 5 general election but a senior official insisted its absence was due to the political motivations of the five-day hearing.

EC deputy chairman Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar told The Malaysian Insider that his officials had been taking down everything people said about the 13th general election at the tribunal that ended yesterday in Subang Jaya.

"Of course, we look through the news every day and know what's going on. This is valuable input and feedback for us. This is what we want," Wan Ahmad told The Malaysian Insider in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

But the EC deputy chairman kept to the official line that the commission did not attend the tribunal organised by the election reforms watchdog due to its political undertones.

"Because it's a tribunal. Call it anything else, a forum, analysis of the shortcomings of GE13, and we would have been there. How can we not have gone if it was a non-political forum to discuss electoral conduct?"

"But when you say it's a tribunal, with political undertones, it just means that they want to make a judgment of who is right and wrong.

"And they want us there to answer questions on the spot or be deemed to have failed in carrying out a free and fair election. How can this be?" he questioned.

In an immediate response, Bersih co-chair Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said the EC had misunderstood the purpose of the tribunal.

"It's a real pity there was a misunderstanding about the purpose of the tribunal. It was really the voice of the people sharing their experiences and nobody will lose out on this. The 5 days were wonderful and it's a pity EC was not there," she said, adding she did not want to be drawn to comment further.

Wan Ahmad went on to admit the EC was "very aware" of all the discrepancies related to people in one home having to vote at different constituencies.

In fact, he disclosed that the issues were discussed in his meetings with political analyst Dr Wong Chin Huat - who had revealed at the tribunal on Saturday how a couple in Kg Abdullah, Segamat, had to vote in two different constituencies.

"He had told me and I had in turn told him that we know. And that we are trying to clean up the electoral roll. It's an on-going process. I even asked them to work with us," he said.

"Remember the electoral roll has been 'rolling' since 1959, with only two million voters then to 13.5 million currently, and until 2001, the database was entered manually," he explained.

But the deputy chairman also felt that it was unfair for Dr Wong to bring up just one case at the tribunal and make general comments that there are many more such cases.

"Still, they can bring all the cases to us, with details such as full name and identity card numbers and we are more than willing to check because we want the same thing, to clean up the roll," he reiterated.

Wan Ahmad (pic, right) also stressed that people needed to come to the EC to make these complaints officially.

But when it was pointed out that the Orang Asli folk for example, who testified at the tribunal that they were threatened into voting for the Barisan Nasional, would find it difficult to write to the EC officially, the deputy chairman said he was more than happy if Bersih documented all the testimonies at the people's tribunal and handed it to the commission.

"We will accept because we want feedback and input. Bersih and even Dr Wong should work with us, instead of having a tribunal to tell the world.

"I feel that it does not help electoral reforms, because at the end of the day we are the body in charge; they should just tell us," he said.

He also pointed out that allegations of the electoral roll not being clean and not updated was a problem the world over, both in advanced countries or developing nations.

Wan Ahmad also appealed to Ambiga to work with the EC, saying that when the organisation first started, he had utmost respect for Ambiga and her movement for free and fair elections.

"I would attend their forums, but then they got carried away and started having demonstrations and rallies which were hijacked by political parties," he said, adding that the relationship between EC and Bersih went south after that.

Wan Ahmad, however, wants to put the past behind and is extending an olive branch to Bersih where he expressed his wish to start "a new chapter".

"We both want reforms; let us work together," he said. - September 23, 2013.

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