

Activist Irene Fernandez dies

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PETALING JAYA: PKR's former vice president and famous activist Irene Fernandez passed away at 10.58am this morning due to heart failure.

Fernandez was a PKR vice-president during the initial years of the party's foundation.

The 67-year-old social activist was also Tenaganita's co-founder and director. Tenaganita is an NGO that champions migrant worker rights.

Five days ago, Fernandez who lived in Seremban, was rushed to Serdang Hospital after suffering from heart complication.

PKR vice-president Tian Chua was among the first to confirm the news.

"Sad news: rights activist Irene Fernandez passed away in Serdang Hospital a while ago. We have lost a dear comrade & old friend," he tweeted.

A message posted in Tenaganita's Facebook stated: "Irene's beautiful, courageous & loving heart rested peacefully at 10.58am this morning, 31st March 2014."

Irene's sister, Josie told FMT that Irene's body would be taken back to her home in Seremban today.

"And then on Thursday, we will be bringing her to her other residence at 29, Jalan SS15/5E (in Subang) and then to a church from there," said Josie who is also an activist.

The service is to be held in Church of Divine Mercy, Shah Alam at 3 pm on Thursday.

"Her body would be cremated as per her wishes after the church service and the ashes would be buried next to our parents' grave in Sungai Petani," Josie added.

Josie said Irene, who leaves behind a son and two daughters, would be remembered as a "good mother, great daughter, great sister and an activist par excellence".

A great daughter of Malaysia

Meanwhile tributes started pouring in for Irene.

Suhakam commissioner James Nayagam said Irene was a human rights advocate to the word and was the voice for human trafficking victims.

"She never looked for rewards and even risked her life to ensure victims received the justice and

attention they needed. I hope the younger generation will follow in her footsteps,” he said

Lawyer and former Bersih chairman S Ambiga expressed her condolences on Twitter by saying: “Irene Fernandez. Always there for the marginalised, you have fought the good fight with passion and courage. Rest now my friend. RIP”

Bersih 2.0 also mourned the passing of Irene Fernandez, saying that it was saddened by the passing of “one of Malaysia’s foremost human rights activists and a great daughter of Malaysia”.

“Irene had a formidable record in activism that spanned across decades and a whole range of difficult, non-mainstream issues related to the poor and marginalised – from people living with HIV to plantation, domestic, sex and migrant workers. Her indefatigable lifelong work for the people earned her the prestigious Right Livelihood Award in 2005.

But Irene never rested on her laurels and continued to give her invaluable contributions to many struggles, including for free and fair elections,” said Bersih 2.0 in a statement.

A Vaithilingam, former president of MCCBCHST said there was “no one else who could be so brave as her in whatever task she set on”.

“This brave lady never surrendered. She kept on caring for the downtrodden, even during her recent difficult times of ill health. Her family can be proud of she choosing the right path in life of selfless service,” he said.

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