

Najib now says committed to human rights, days after denouncing 'human rights-ism'
Malaysian Insider
May 17, 2014
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Datuk Seri Najib Razak reiterated last night that Putrajaya was committed to the principles and values of human rights, days after the prime minister was roundly criticised for saying "human rights-ism" was a threat to Islam in Malaysia.

In a statement emailed to the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham), Najib said "as Malaysians, we believe in human rights, and subscribe to the philosophy, concepts and norms of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights".

He also stressed that despite Malaysia being a Muslim-majority nation, "our faith respects other faiths, and our commitment can be consistent with our constitution and our values".

Proham, however, pointed out that Najib's earlier confusing terms such as "extreme human rights" and "human rights-ism" have still not been clarified.

The prime minister's statement to Proham was also posted on his Facebook page but the human rights body called on Najib's office to issue this statement through national news agency Bernama and that it be made available on the prime minister's website.

"One way forward is for the prime minister to host a gathering of human rights organisations who have played, and are playing, a major role in the promotion and protection of human rights.

"To dialogue on how to foster a culture of human rights consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as understanding the local history and context of Malaysia," said Proham chairman Datuk Kuthubul Zaman and secretary-general Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria in a statement.

In addition, Proham called on Putrajaya to chart out a National Human Rights Action Plan, which is long overdue, as well as ratify the core human

rights conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) as discussed in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

On Tuesday, Bernama had reported Najib as saying that Islam was now threatened by "human rights-ism, liberalism, secularism and humanism".

Najib was speaking at the opening of the National Quran Recital Competition in Kuantan where he had also coined the phrase "human rights-ism".

He said the understanding of extreme human rights could be moderated by the law, the Federal Constitution and cultural values of Malaysia.

Proham had urged Najib to clarify or withdraw his comments on "extreme human rights" which the prime minister had also said was a new threat against Islam and Muslims.

Expressing shock at Najib's statement, Proham had said the remark raised "greater concerns" about Putrajaya's commitment to fostering human rights in Malaysian society.

On Friday, a lawyers group joined the growing chorus of disapproval of Najib's philosophy that "human rights -ism" was a threat to Islam in Malaysia.

Lawyers for Liberty executive director Eric Paulsen said such appalling comments by the prime minister merely reinforced his false "reformist" credential.

"Although outwardly and in the international arena he has advocated for human rights, moderation and rejection of extremism, but in the country, he seems to be singing a different tune," Paulsen told The Malaysian Insider.

Paulsen said that Najib was in fact embracing the views of extremist and fascist groups like Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) and Perkasa.

"Let us be clear, Malaysia is a country founded on parliamentary democracy where the Federal Constitution, which is secular in nature, reigns supreme

and it guarantees certain fundamental rights to all its citizens regardless of race or religion," he added.

He said Najib's conduct was an irresponsible act of political grandstanding, calculated to burnish his Islamic credentials.

"He is also attempting to out-Islamise PAS without considering the best interests of Malaysia and its people," Paulsen added.

The DAP also condemned the prime minister's remarks, describing it as a twisted turn in the government's desperate campaign to demonise the "other" especially when Najib had warned that it was "retrograde" and that it rejects the values of religion and etiquette. – May 17, 2014.

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