

Removal of Free Anwar petition an error, says US embassy
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The White House made a mistake when it removed a petition posted on its website urging the Obama administration to free jailed opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, said the United States Embassy in Malaysia.

It said today that the White House standard fraud checks indicated a high number of anomalous signatures on a petition related to Anwar's imprisonment, but because of the multiple petitions on the issue, it had mistakenly taken down the free Anwar petition.

"There were multiple petitions related to this issue, and after follow-up assessment, The White House determined that the petition it removed was not the one that contained fraudulent signatures," the US embassy posted on its Facebook page.

"To account for the error, the White House has since re-enabled the petition titled 'Make the Release of Malaysian Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim from Prison a Top Priority for US Policy Toward Malaysia', and is extending the deadline to account for the time lost while the petition was disabled. No signatures were removed."

It said the White House later determined that the fraudulent signatures existed in the petition 'Respecting the Sovereign Nation of Malaysia', and had temporarily disabled it from the website.

"Respecting the Sovereign Nation of Malaysia" is a counter-petition that states Malaysians are "outraged" by the White House's statement expressing its disappointment with Anwar's sodomy conviction. The petition urges the US to "stop interfering in Malaysia's judiciary and rule of law".

"On March 9, White House standard fraud checks indicated a high number of anomalous signatures on the petition titled 'Respecting the Sovereign Nation of Malaysia'," wrote the US embassy.

"After a follow-up evaluation, the White House has disabled the petition while it removes a number of signatures that violated the We the People Terms of Participation."

It said once the invalid signatures are removed, the White House will re-enable the petition, extending the deadline to account for the time lost while the petition was disabled.

The counter-petition has since been restored to the website this morning, but with only 12,070 signatures.

"The White House regularly evaluates a variety of factors for indications of potential fraud, but to ensure it never removes valid signatures, it investigates thoroughly to

identify the clear-cut cases of fraud, which takes time," said the US embassy.

"The White House will continue to evaluate signatures on all petitions for fraudulent activity."

The Free Anwar petition has received 108,291 signatures at the time of writing.

For the petition, which was submitted to the White House on February 10, to be successful and receive a response from President Barack Obama's administration, it has to reach 100,000 signatures by tomorrow.

The petition was started by former US ambassador to Malaysia John R. Malott, who submitted it to the site soon after the Federal Court on February 10 found Anwar guilty of sodomy and sentenced him to five years in prison. – March 11, 2015.

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