

Jurists demand Nurul Izzah's release, Sedition Act repeal
The Malaysian Insider
March 17, 2015

A global jurists' group have condemned Putrajaya's continued use of the Sedition Act 1948, saying today Malaysia must free Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar a day after she was arrested under the colonial-era law.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), comprising 60 judges and lawyers from all regions of the world, said the Sedition Act's vague and broad provisions were incompatible with international human rights standards.

"The Malaysian authorities must stop the continued use of the offence of sedition to arbitrarily detain and stifle freedom of expression," ICJ's Asia-Pacific director Sam Zarifi said in a statement last night.

"The ICJ also calls on the government of Malaysia to immediately release Nurul Izzah and reiterates its call for the repeal of the Sedition Act."

It also noted Nurul Izzah would have her remand hearing this morning after having spent the night in jail and said it would continue to monitor her case.

The commission said the Sedition Act "contemplates restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression that are grossly overbroad and inconsistent with basic rule of law and human rights principles".

It added the term "seditious tendencies" mentioned in the act was "ambiguously defined" to mean any kind of speech or publication that causes hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection against any ruler or the government or promotes ill will and hostility between the different races or classes.

It also noted that the law also considers "seditious" any speech or publication that questions the special privileges of the Malay people, as provided in the constitution.

"Furthermore, sedition is a strict liability offence in Malaysia, which means that the intention of a person allegedly making seditious statements is irrelevant.

"For instance, a person making a statement may not have the intent to cause 'hatred or contempt' towards the government, but may nonetheless be held liable for sedition if authorities believe that the person in fact incited such feelings," said ICJ.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said Nurul Izzah's arrest showed that Putrajaya knew no bounds in stifling free speech and criminalising dialogue considered normal in political discourse.

"Prime Minister Najib needs to recognise that every sedition arrest of an opposition political leader is another step towards the destruction of rights-respecting democracy in Malaysia, and bring this campaign of abuse to an end," he said in a brief

statement today sent to The Malaysian Insider.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said last night Nurul Izzah was being investigated under the Sedition Act over the #KitaLawan rally and for making "contemptuous remarks" against the judiciary.

The #KitaLawan rally in the capital city, Kuala Lumpur on March 7 was to pressure the government into releasing opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and to call for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's resignation.

Nurul Izzah's speech in Parliament last week also criticised the judiciary for bowing to "political masters" in the Federal Court's verdict to uphold Anwar's sodomy conviction and jail sentence.

Former Perkasa vice-president Datuk Zulkifli Noordin had lodged a police report against Nurul Izzah over her speech. – March 17, 2015.

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