

Wrong to ban SIS, allow different views, Anwar tells Muslim authorities

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Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today that Muslim authorities should allow public space for divergent views promoted by groups like Sisters In Islam (SIS)

The opposition leader said while it was the right of the National Fatwa Council to disagree with SIS, it should not have banned the group.

Anwar also defended Selangor Menteri Besar Mohamed Azmin Ali's stance on the fatwa, saying that the latter merely said he respected it.

"My position is that there must be an avenue for people to agree to disagree and to continue to have discussions in a proper forum," Anwar told reporters after giving a speech at the Muslim Democrats Conference dinner in Petaling Jaya tonight.

"I have reservations about the fatwa. It can express disagreements but I don't think they should ban discourse in the first place."

SIS is filing a judicial review on a fatwa gazetted in July which declared that SIS and any other similar organisations that promote religious liberalism and plurality as being deviant to the teachings of Islam.

In addition, any publication that promoted liberal and pluralistic religious thinking would be declared unlawful and confiscated.

SIS have named the Selangor Fatwa Committee, Selangor Islamic Religious Council (Mais) and the state government as respondents in the judicial review.

The group said it was challenging the fatwa on constitutional grounds.

In his remarks today, Anwar said religious authorities should not place a blanket ban on concepts such as liberalism and pluralism without first looking at how they are being used in Muslim intellectual discourse.

Muslim authorities, Anwar said, should allow for more space in society to discuss the different interpretations of these concepts.

"Liberalism can mean openness and pluralism is an ideal that has been advanced by (famous Tunisian Muslim scholar) Rached Ghannouchi., who said that Islam is pluralistic. You cannot label Ghannouchi as deviant.

"If pluralism means that you reject the Muslim faith as the true faith, then that is different. But pluralism can also mean diversity, which is respected and noble."

Meanwhile, Azmin said that he was not qualified to comment on whether the fatwa was properly done as he was not a part of the Fatwa Council which issued the decree.

He added that the Selangor Muslim Affairs Council (Mais) will meet SIS over the fatwa that declared the latter a deviant organisation.

Azmin said the meeting would allow Mais to listen to SIS's point of view while the latter would also have the chance to learn the reasons behind the fatwa.

"This is a positive development to enable SIS to discuss the fatwa with Mais and for the Mufti's office to look into the matter.

"I urged both parties to take this consultative approach and the Mufti has agreed to this.

"This is the best way so that both parties can get explanations from each other," Azmin told reporters when met after the Muslim Democrats Conference.

Azmin was criticised today by SIS for saying that the state government respected the Fatwa Council's decision to issue the decree. – November 2, 2014.

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