

**Christians too have the right to worship, Nik Nazmi tells Muslim group**  
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**BY ANISAH SHUKRY**

Christians have a right to their own places of worship, and allowing the construction of a church in Petaling Jaya will not make the Malays any less Muslim, PKR Seri Setia state assemblyman Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said today.

He said that Muslims should have no issue with the construction of the four-storey Praise Emmanuel Assembly church in his constituency, as non-Muslim places of worship have co-existed peacefully even during Prophet Muhammad's time.

"I don't think (the proposed church) is an insult to Muslims. We can see other places of worship in PJ and across Malaysia that co-exist peacefully. It's part of our tradition.

"Respecting the rights of other faiths doesn't make us less Muslim. In fact, it is very Islamic and in line with the tradition of our Prophet and the Quran (to allow others to practise their beliefs).

"But of course people always try to make this into a political issue," the Selangor executive councillor told The Malaysian Insider.

Nik Nazmi added that despite protest by some of the local residents and a Muslim NGO, the construction of the church would go on as long as it followed the procedures.

"So far, it has followed all the proper procedures. It was already zoned as a non-Muslim place of worship, and there have been discussions with the stakeholders," said Nik Nazmi.

Yesterday, a Muslim NGO called Pertubuhan Sahabat demonstrated at the church site at Jalan PJS 8/9, saying it was not appropriate for a neighbourhood that it claimed to have 70% of its residents as Muslim.

The group said building the church in the area would be an insult to Muslims staying there, and that Nik Nazmi was not sensitive to the feelings of Muslims in the area.

"The area is a multi-racial community, and we should engage in a positive manner with people of other faiths, rather than try to stop the construction of the church," said Nik Nazmi today.

"The proposal has been there since 2008 and 2009, so this is obviously more about politics than anything else."

The PKR Youth chief added that the church had already operated at a shoplot nearby for many years, and that many Christians had worshipped there.

"At the end of the day, the zone had always been gazetted as a place of worship for non-Muslims. If you don't want that church there, what will happen to the land?"

Yesterday, a Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) councillor said the site of the church had been alienated and gazetted in 2001 as a place of worship during Barisan Nasional (BN) rule.

MBPJ councillor Cynthia Gabriel said all legal requirements had been met by the church.

"The land was gazetted in 2001 during BN's time. So if all legal and procedural requirements had been followed, then MBPJ sees no issue with the building of the church," Cynthia had told The Malaysian Insider.

A spokesperson for the NGO, Ishak Maarof, reportedly said that MBPJ had told them that they had called for a public hearing, but maintained that neither his group nor the surau or mosque representatives were informed. – November 3, 2014.

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