

Maria Chin hands memorandum to Suhakam over police harassment

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Bersih 2.0 chief calls for inquiry and review of laws that have been abused by authorities in going after its members and supporters over the past few months.

KUALA LUMPUR: Bersih 2.0 today urged the human rights commission (Suhakam) to investigate the continued harassment and 119 arrests by police against Bersih 2.0 members and supporters.

Bersih 2.0 chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah said that such actions by the police amount to preventing them from exercising their rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.

“The harassment and intimidation of Bersih 2.0 and its supporters is a contravention of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Defenders,” Maria said referring to a resolution that was passed in the UN in December 2015 with 127 nations, including Malaysia, voting in favour.

She called for Suhakam to carry out an inquiry of the continued state of harassment of human rights defenders involved in Bersih 2.0 activities allegedly by Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar, the home ministry, the police and the government.

The leader of the electoral watchdog also called for a review of the laws that have been abused, such as Peaceful Assembly Act, the Sedition Act, Malaysia’s Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (Sosma), by the authorities in going after Bersih 2.0 members and supporters.

Maria added that a Parliamentary Select Committee should be established as well, for the protection and review of any abuse of freedom of expression and assembly.

The memorandum was received by Suhakam commissioners Lok Yim Pheng, Godfrey Gregory Joitol, Jerald Joseph and officer Muhammad Faiz Abd Rahman.

Last month, three Bersih steering committee members, namely Mandeep Singh, Zoe Randhawa and Chan Tsu Chong, were questioned by the officers from the Dang Wangi district police headquarters. They were questioned over claims that they did not give the required 10-day notice under the Peaceful Assembly Act.

This was pertaining to the “Bebas Maria” candlelight vigil gathering at Dataran Merdeka from Nov 21 to Nov 28 last year.

Bersih held vigils on a daily basis until she was released on Nov 28. The gatherings saw crowds holding candles as well as placards condemning detention without trial.

Maria was arrested on Nov 18, less than 24 hours before the Bersih 5 rally which took place on Nov 19, in Kuala Lumpur. She was detained under Sosma to facilitate investigations under Section 124C of the Penal Code for attempting an act detrimental to parliamentary democracy.

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