



Civil Society Joint Statement on Malaysia Day 2010

WHEN the peoples of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore came together in 1963, Malaysia was a promise of freedom and fraternity, that all the children of this land would love and support each other to develop and progress.

A Promise of Fraternity through Freedom Malaysia was a promise of fraternity.

For none of Malaysia's children were meant to be asked to leave their country for some foreign land. And no one was meant to be insulted and marginalised because of his or her ethnicity, faith, birthplace, lifestyle or any other group attributes.

Malaysia was a promise of freedom. Like every other nation on Earth, we would inevitably have differences on how the country was to be run and how resources and opportunities shared. We were meant to listen and understand each other, and seek solutions acceptable to all. We were not meant to silence each other by resorting to threats of riot or imprisonment.

Malaysia cannot be an independent nation if Malaysians are not free.

Malaysia was indeed such a promise, not only of fraternity *and* freedom, but specifically of fraternity *through* freedom. We were not meant to be a fraternity of slaves, living in peace merely out of fear of draconian laws or ethnic riots. Neither were we meant to exercise our freedom irresponsibly and heartlessly to cause or ignore misery of our brothers and sisters.

We were meant to use our freedom – uncompromised by our diversity – to chart a common future and a better tomorrow for all. It's the desire for freedom and the confidence that we can collectively use freedom wisely that confirm our independence from colonisation. And that's why Malaysia as a whole is – or should be - greater than the sum of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak.

What has gone wrong?

What has happened to this great promise of fraternity and freedom? Where are our civil and political liberties after 47 years of independence? How is our social harmony after 47 years of co-existence?

We have educationists openly calling for ethnic minorities to leave the country. We have politicians demonising gestures of good wills between different religious communities. We have self-appointed communal heroes mongering fear and hatred, lodging police reports against opinions disapproved by them. Subsequently, we have vulgar expressions of counter-attacks.

Every society has fringe individuals and groups going all out to offend others. The only way to stop them is to expose their slurs shunned by the mainstream opinion, the very people they claim to champion, not by imprisoning them and making them martyrs. However, for common sense to prevail, we need freedom of expression and freedom of information.

By no accident at all, the perceived escalation of communal tensions happens concurrently with selective crackdown on mainstream and alternative media. Critical journalists – from television, radio and print media – are either removed or marginalised. Books and cartoons are banned while bloggers are harassed and intimidated.

Rational discussion and legitimate dissent are simply muted while certain media organisations are allowed the maximum freedom to spread bigotry and ill-will. These media operators want to terrify us Malaysians into denouncing freedom – what the Independence is really about – by manipulating our love for peace. They want us to cling on to authoritarianism. They even openly call for ISA arrests to silence dissent.

Why are the bigoted politicians and their media collaborators so bold in challenging the common sense of Malaysians? They call us the silent majority. Do they know silence can be powerful, too? When the silent majority act together, then silence can be more deafening than any noise.

Let us reclaim our Independence

This Malaysia Day, let us all work to reclaim our country, not only for ourselves, but also for the future generations to come. It has to begin with ourselves, not anybody else.

As the Native American wisdom aptly puts it, “We do not inherit this land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

Let us guard this land from the fire of hatred, ignorance and fear, and return it intact to our descendants.

Let us take some time to reflect in silence on the part we have played in letting this country stoop so low, either by commission or omission.

Let us reach out to other Malaysians, out of love, not out of fear or tolerance.

Let us listen to each other and seek understanding even if we disagree. Let us reaffirm our Independence and defeat any attempt of mental colonisation.

Let us live the promise of fraternity through freedom that Malaysia was born for 47 years ago.

The endorsing civil society groups:

1. Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN)
2. Borneo Research Institute Sarawak (BRIMAS)
3. Child Development Initiative

4. Civil Rights Committee, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (CRC-KLSCAH)

5. Community Development Centre (CDC)

6. Council of Temples Malaysia

7. Educational, Welfare and Research Foundation Malaysia

8. Federation of Indian Non-Governmental Organisations

9. Friends in Conversation (FIC)

10. Frinjan Collective

11. Group of Concerned Citizens (GCC)

12. Hartal MSM

13. Indian Malaysian Active Generation (IMAGE)

14. Institute for Development of Alternative Living (IDEAL)

15. Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF)

16. Jaringan Orang Asal Semalaysia -JOAS (indigenous peoples network of Malaysia)

17. Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT)

18. Klang Consumer Association

19. Kuala Lumpur And Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Youth Section

20. LLG Cultural Development Centre

21. Majlis Kelab Bell Belia Tamil Malaysia

22. Malacca Chinese Assembly Hall Youth Section

23. Malaysian Association of Indian University Graduates

24. Malaysian Dravidian Association

25. Malaysian Hindu Youth Council

26. Malaysian Indian Development & Unity Association

27. Malaysian Indian Historical Association

28. Malaysian Tamil Forum

29. Malaysians for Beng Hock

30. Muslim Professionals Forum (MPF)

31. Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall Youth Section

32. Oriental Hearts & Mind Study Institute (OHMSI)

33. Pahlawan Volunteers

34. PeBT MPSJ Zon 23

35. PERMAS (Persatuan Masyarakat Selangor Dan Wilayah Persekutuan)

36. Persahabatan Semparuthi

37. Persatuan Alumni PBTUSM Selangor & Kuala Lumpur

38. Persatuan Kebangsaan Hak Asasi Manusia (HAKAM)

39. Persatuan Komuniti Prihatin Kuala Lumpur, Selangor & Perak (PRIHATIN)

40. Persatuan Penduduk Taman Muhibbah

41. PT Foundation

42. PUSAT KOMAS

43. Research for Social Advancement (REFSA)

44. Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (SADIA)

45. Sarawak Native Land Rights Owners (TAHABAS)

46. Sarawakians Access (SACCESS)

47. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)

48. Tamil Foundation

49. The Micah Mandate (TMM)

50. The Penang Independent Schools Education Society

51. Women Institute for Research Development and Advancement (WIRDA)

52. Writer Alliance for Media Independence (WAMI)

53. Youth for Change (Y4C)

The endorsing party organisation:

1. Wanita Parti Keadilan Rakyat