

SAYA ANAK BANGSA MALAYSIA

MELBOURNE . AUSTRALIA



THE Peaceful Assembly Bill should be called the "No Peaceful Assembly Bill" and it should be debated on the internet as a matter of urgency, an offshore Malaysian NGO said today.

"Najib Razak's latest legislative proposal imposes draconian restrictions on the public's right to freedom of speech," said the Australian chapter of Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia in a statement, "but the PM thinks it's 'revolutionary' and a 'giant leap'. Therefore, the public itself must be given the right of reply in a proper, easily accessed platform."

SABMoz said: "We can't all attend parliament and there is no better place for such a debate than the worldwide web.

"It can be organised - it is not a difficult proposition in this age of social media - in the interests of all the people who have a stake in freedom, to openly discuss how the government proposes to define this fundamental right on behalf of all Malaysians."

SABMoz President, David Teoh, said in Melbourne that "we envision a live streamed debate both on mainstream media and other news portals.

SABMoz said that "the internet is the best avenue to reach out to Gen-Y, to engage with the

very people in whose hands the future of Malaysia lies".

"We have heard from various politicians. We now need to hear from the public, the likes of those who felt so strongly about Malaysia's future that they came in the tens of thousands on July 9 to show how much they cared.

"The government owes the public this debate. It must move from parliament and into the public sphere.

"SABMoz will consult with the wider group of Malaysian NGOs, and we propose to select five young Malaysians to articulate their feelings on the proposed legislation. Of course, the government, which believes this legislation is right for Malaysia, is invited to do the same.

"In this process, the public will be able to appreciate the full and far reaching implications of the proposed bill, and discussions will empower the ordinary rakyat to have a say in the country's future.

"We call on the government to publicly debate this proposed law and, in so doing, rise to the challenge of accountability."

SABMoz said the bill also "usurped the role of the judiciary in favour of the Home Minister, to whom an applicant for a peaceful assembly would have to go in order to review a police rejection".

"The feedback we have received is that this has been poorly drafted and has left a lot of loop holes. New laws with such far reaching implications should not be hastily debated and passed in Parliament without careful deliberation at a committee level with input from the general public."

SABMoz said that, while "it fully supported the amendments to the bill proposed by the Bar Council and SUHAKAM, it would serve Malaysia best if such a bill never saw the light of day".

"But that is only our opinion - we need to hear from the people."