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IT has been said many times in this column that as a nation we need to move away from race-based politics and policy-making.

Whenever the issue is raised, however, there will normally follow responses that refer to the inequitable distribution of wealth in the country. The usual argument is that Malays still make up the largest number of poor and thus require affirmative action.

I agree that the largest number of poor households is still largely Malay. This being the case, if we discard ethnic-based policy-making and focus purely on poverty alleviation, the largest group that would be receiving help will still be Malays.

The difference with a colour-blind policy, however, will be two-fold.

Firstly, as a nation that purports to hold civilised values, it is of vital importance for us to embrace the ideal that all sectors of society, regardless of their skin colour, must be helped if they need help.

Secondly, it is unsustainable for us to continue to be governed based on race for there is no way we can grow successfully as a nation if there is a deep and abiding sense of division among us.

As the saying goes, talk is cheap. If one were to take this route, how does one go about it?

Surely the priority should be towards the building of a more equitable society, in terms of income, education, opportunities for development and institutional fairness.

Fortunately, two NGOs have decided to take the bull by the horns and have come up with an interesting suggestion.

Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM) and the National Human Rights Society (Hakam) have drafted a proposed law called the Social Inclusion Act (SIA).

The SIA does not actually provide immediate answers or quick fixes.

Instead, it proposes a method through which we can develop policies that will be beneficial to Malaysians who are disadvantaged and marginalised.

What it suggests is the creation of a Social Inclusion Commission. This commission will consist of seven people who are knowledgeable and experienced in the issues at hand, i.e. poverty and social marginalisation.

The shortlist is to be drawn up by a bipartisan parliamentary committee. The committee then passes the shortlist to the Prime Minister who then advises the Yang DiPertuan Agong who finally makes the appointments.

In other words, the commissioners will not be appointed on the say-so of one person.

There is also a strict requirement of disclosure in the SIA where commissioners are bound to disclose any interest they, their family members or associates might have with any matter which is related to their work.

This commission is to be responsible to Parliament to whom they will have to report regularly. These reports are also to be made available to the public.

The commission, once established, has the responsibility to address issues of poverty reduction, income inequality, institutional discrimination, capacity building for marginalised and vulnerable communities, and the provision of social safety nets.

They are to then draft policies to deal with these issues and governmental plans of action are to be made in line with these policies.

There is a close link between the commission and Parliament, with the commission having the responsibility not only to report to the House but to also take all necessary steps to involve MPs

in the development and implementation of their plans.

To me, this proposed law is attractive for many reasons.

Firstly and most crucially, it is concerned with the most vulnerable and needful sectors of the Malaysian community.

Secondly, it provides for a transparent modus operandi.

Thirdly, its work is closely intertwined with Parliament, thus respecting the democratic system.

And finally, it functions on the premise that concerted research has to be done in formulating policies.

Naturally, there is much work to be done to refine the SIA.

However, it is a bold first step forward for the country and it ought to be taken seriously by anyone who is serious about creating a nation which is more just, inclusive and caring.