

Press Release from BERSIH 25 June 2022**PROTEST IS NOT ONLY A FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT BUT AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR HISTORY**

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) reiterates that peaceful assembly is a fundamental right of all citizens guaranteed under Article 10 of the Federal Constitution, along with the right to freedom of speech, expression and to form associations. Furthermore, the freedom to protest without violence is enshrined in our supreme law because protests have played an integral part in our nation's history to shape our destiny and bring pressure to bear on unjust laws and corrupt authorities. The BERSIH rallies over the years had been referred to by the Sultan of Johor in a statement yesterday as "black marks" and "riots" in our nation's history as, in His Majesty's views, these protests only led to "negative" impacts such as chaos and destruction.

BERSIH respectfully disagrees, and we would like to point out that protests are legitimate means of political expression and are formative to our country's history.

Arguably, one can say that this country was born out of a protest movement. Dato Onn Jaafar rallied the masses to object against the Malayan Union, which was unilaterally imposed by the British after the Second World War, and this paved the way to the formation of the Federation of Malaya, the precursor to our eventual independence from the British in 1957 and the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Dato Onn and UMNO were not the only ones to use protest as a legitimate means of collective action. The multi-racial Putera-AMCJA coalition through leaders like Ishak Haji Muhammad, Tan Cheng Lock, K.Ganapathy and Dr Burhanuddin Helmy launched a countrywide protest (hartal) in 1947 to advocate for the People's Constitution. Throughout the passage of time, from Demonstrasi Baling to Reformasi, the Rakyat has resorted to protest to express their solidarity and grievances. Most recently, the Malaysian Bar protested for the fourth time in their Walk for Judicial Independence.

BERSIH carried on this spirit since we are formed in 2006 to highlight electoral malpractices and shortcomings that rendered our elections less than fair or free for a democracy. Through our protests, we put a spotlight on these failings and awoken the Rakyat to demand for better elections from the Election Commission. The introduction of the indelible ink and subsequent improvements to the conduct of elections and the expansion of voting access to voters would not have come about if not for the pressure placed on the EC.

The fourth and fifth rallies in 2015 and 2016 respectively came about due the 1MDB scandal, which has been described as the world's biggest case of kleptocracy, where up to RM42 billions were stolen. BERSIH responded to this grand-scale thievery by organising two peaceful protests where hundreds of thousands of Malaysians turned up. We demanded for institutional changes to existing laws to end the scourge of corruption in this country and for the culprits will be held accountable.

If the Rakyat had not had the opportunity to express their anger towards electoral injustices and grand-scale corruption in a peaceful manner, who knows what would have happened to our country? The kleptocrat and his accomplices could have continued to plunder this country and not be charged for the crimes they have committed. Surely Your Majesty would not condone such a tragedy, had the rakyat not been mobilised to demand a stop to the plunder.

BERSIH has from the very beginning committed ourselves to organising peaceful protests and if there had been disorderly conducts, chaos or even damaged to properties, it had usually been caused by aggressive actions by the police who, instead of facilitating the peaceful protestors, attacked us with tear gas, water cannons and brute force. We have proven beyond doubt that we could organise large-scale peaceful protests during Bersih 4 and 5, where apart from blocking several roads and places, the police left us alone.

Your Majesty, history proves that civil disobedience has always been part and parcel of our DNA. BERSIH invites Your Majesty to join us in not only respecting but celebrating the Rakyat's fundamental rights to freedom of speech, expression, form associations and hold peaceful protests. As a nation practicing parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, we ought to welcome and recognize any expression and participation by our Rakyat for the common good of Malaysia. Without protests, there would have been no Malaysia.

Statement issued by: The Steering Committee of BERSIH

NOTE: We made a decision to drop the 2.0 from the name of our organization on 23 November 2021, and shall henceforth be known only as BERSIH.