

10 November 2008

Police Attack on Citizens singing National Anthem: Contempt of Nation and King

We, the undersigned civil society groups, express our strongest condemnation of the brutal attack by policemen on a 100-strong crowd of Malaysians who were singing the national anthem Negaraku. The event took place last night (Sunday, 9 Nov 2008) at the BERSIH peaceful gathering outside MBPJ's Civic Hall, Petaling Jaya.

Members of the public had gathered to commemorate the first anniversary of the BERSIH rally on 10 November 2007 as well as demand for the abolition of the ISA. The attack was not only an outright human rights violation, but it also demonstrated outrageous contempt of the Nation and His Majesty The King.

The police used brute and excessive force on the peaceful crowd. As the crowd sang the following lines of the national anthem – “Raja kita selamat bertakhta” [May the King reign in peace], FRU personnel and plainclothes officers charged at the crowd and started chasing and grabbing people at random.

A 53-year-old woman named Dian Abdullah was attacked from behind by a few policemen, causing her to fall and injure the back of her head. A bystander took her to the hospital where she received four stitches for the cut.

MP for Petaling Jaya Utara, Tony Pua and Kampung Tunku state assemblyman Lau Weng San were manhandled and punched respectively. A PAS member was set upon by six police officers on the five-foot-way right outside Lotus Restaurant.

We would like to stress that, first and foremost, it is every Malaysians' birth right to peaceful assembly, as enshrined in Article 10 of the Federal Constitution. The police dispersal of citizens' peaceful gathering is unwarranted and an act of contempt against the Constitution.

We are deeply appalled by the unusual manner of the police dispersal of citizens in a peaceful gathering. Under 'more normal' circumstances, the police officer in charge would order the crowd to disperse within five minutes before taking any action. While Malaysians are taught from young to stand to attention when the national anthem is being played or sung, the behaviour of the police was such that they felt they had to stop the peaceful crowd from finishing the song and then proceeded to punish them violently.

We urge Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Syed Albar to immediately apologize to Malaysians and we demand that the Selangor Chief of Police, Deputy Comm Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar to take responsibility for his part in this fiasco and resign.

We call on all Malaysians to unite, regardless of our political persuasion, to defend the national symbol and basic human rights.

The 9 November police attack on the citizens, the nation and the monarchy has yet again reminded us of the urgent and immediate need for an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC).

Endorsing organisations:

1. Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH)
2. Writer Alliance for Media Independence (WAMI)
3. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
4. Centre for Policy Initiatives (CPI)
5. Workers Organisation of Malaysia
6. Group of Concerned Citizens (GCC)
7. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation (MSN)
8. Persatuan Alumni PBTUSM Selangor
9. Malaysian Youth and Students Democratic Movement (DEMA)
10. Civil Rights Committee, KLSCAH
11. Citizen Think Tank (CTT)

* *BERSIH is a coalition of five political parties and over 70 NGOs.*