

**Opening Remarks by Chair SUHAKAM – Tan Sri Razali Ismail**  
Press Conference to Introduce New Lineup of SUHAKAM Members  
14 July 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. SUHAKAM and my fellow Commissioners for the period 2016-2019 welcome you to this press conference. On 21 June 2016, YAB the Prime Minister announced the new lineup, 6 new commissioners, including myself and 2 retained from the previous commission.
  
2. To the members of the Press, please continue critically to examine SUHAKAM's work. Do not spare us, but treat us gingerly at this early stage. Collectively we have a long way to go and public expectations after all these years are demanding. SUHAKAM has a mandate entrusted by the people.
  
3. Now allow me to introduce the Members of the Commission :
  - i. Professor Dato' Dr Aishah Bidin  
  
She is a professor of law at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and has been reappointed as a Member of SUHAKAM after completing her first term from 2013 to 2016.

ii. Mr. Francis Johen

He had served as the Deputy Attorney General for the State of Sarawak from 2008 to 2011. He has also been reappointed as a Member of SUHAKAM after completing his first term from 2013 to 2016.

iii. Dato' Mah Weng Kwai

He was a Judicial Commissioner of the High Court of Malaya and subsequently a Judge of the High Court of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in 2011. He was elevated to the Court of Appeal, Malaysia on 21 September 2012.

iv. Datuk Lok Yim Pheng

She is the Secretary General of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) as well as the Secretary-General of Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (CUEPACS). She also heads the National Joint Council for Support Group Workers.

v. Datuk Godfrey Gregory Joitol

He joined the Sabah Civil Service in 1978 and retired as Deputy State Secretary (Development) in 2011. He is currently an independent Director of a Sabah State Government-owned company, Saham Sabah Berhad

(SSB) and a member of the Audit & Compliance Committee and the Establishment & Administration Committee.

vi. Dr. Nik Salida Suhaila binti Nik Saleh

She is currently a senior lecturer of Faculty of Syariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM).

vii. Mr Jerald Joseph

He is presently a Board Member and Advisor of the Anti-racism and Non-Discrimination Programme of Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat Sdn Bhd (Pusat KOMAS).

4. I would like to take this opportunity to pay total tribute to the previous batch of Commissioners headed by Tan Sri Hasmy Agam for their contributions and unstinting efforts to operationalize human rights.
5. As new Members of the Commission, we will continue the work of the Commission to fulfil the mandate and discharge the duties of SUHAKAM to the best of our ability. There is a lot that needs to be done in the field of human rights in the country. As Malaysia makes reasonable strides in achieving economic growth towards becoming a high-income and developed nation, there needs to be an equal level of progress in the promotion and protection of human rights.

This is not always the case. While not dismissing the huge commendable efforts made by the Government to promote greater economic growth and progress thereby enhancing attributes of human rights, SUHAKAM believes that human rights is not given the priority and comprehensive commitment it needs. The files of SUHAKAM contain many collaborated instances of violations and deprivation of human rights. For instance, marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, women, children and especially those who are not Malaysian citizens including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and stateless persons remain the most vulnerable to human rights abuses.

6. Economic growth and prosperity are vital for us as a nation, but a nation is truly proud and consolidated when its people by free choice can embrace human rights and human dignity. In essence, status quo is not an acceptable option. SUHAKAM must be more successful in pleading and cajoling for palpable advancements in human rights. Responsible bodies need not fear that human rights will threaten security and that human rights condone and is weak towards irresponsibility that can affect our societal fabric, especially in our present climate of terrorism and extremism. SUHAKAM believes that respect for human rights is part of Malaysia's national ethos, forged by people of different strands finding home and harmony in Malaysia.

7. Malaysia is deservedly a respected member of the international community and therefore must dedicate greater effort and resources to fulfil its international human rights obligations. This includes acceding to the treaties on Human Rights which the country has not yet done while others around us have acceded more than us. SUHAKAM appeals to the Government that this somewhat embarrassing situation be rectified soon. It is not enough that achievements made are satisfactory in the eyes of the United Nations and the international community. It will be pointless if we satisfy the international community but on the ground, in our country our people, many of them, do not think so.
  
8. At a time when the world is faced with rapid technological advancements, volatile markets, unprecedented migration trends, armed conflicts and apocalyptic terrorism, as well as climate change, the promotion and protection of human rights is becoming an increasingly necessary, challenging and complex undertaking. It is crucial that SUHAKAM further builds its capacity and strengthens its expertise so that it is in a better position to play a more effective role. Status quo is not enough, staying on as we are, places our country as one that has resorted to tokenism. SUHAKAM must fulfill its mandate and public expectations. SUHAKAM is bewildered and saddened that Parliament does not truly take cognizance of our annual report. That our funding has been drastically slashed is disappointing and can emasculate our work.

9. SUHAKAM will strive to strengthen and make more meaningful its partnership with government agencies and civil society and media. SUHAKAM believes we must complement each other in a mutually reinforcing context as every stakeholder has its respective expertise and strengths in addressing human rights issues. It is already 16 years, SUHAKAM's files are full with records of unending meetings with paltry results and of protracted expectations, if not promises.
  
10. To conclude, this band of commissioners and the Secretariat of SUHAKAM are determined to fulfill the mandate given by the people. We will discharge our duties and turn the corner with the ultimate goal of promoting human rights as a universal aspiration and intrinsic to our national ethos.

Thank you.