



MINISTER IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT

OPENING ADDRESS BY

HON. SENATOR DATUK PAUL LOW SENG KUAN

AT THE

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF HUMAN RIGHTS WEEK 2014

A joint commemoration of the 2014 International Human Rights Day by the United Nations Country Team of Malaysia and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation, PROHAM and the Bar Council

AUDITORIUM, LEVEL 2, INSTITUT INTEGRITI MALAYSIA

ON

8TH DECEMBER, 2014

Distinguished guests,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is with great pleasure for me to be here today and to officiate the launch of Human Rights Week in conjunction with the celebration of the 2014 Human Rights Day. At the onset, let me congratulate the United Nations Country Team of Malaysia (UNCT), the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF), PROHAM, as well as the Bar Council on the organisation of this meaningful programme. This is the first time I am officiating a Human Rights Day programme as the Minister in charge of Governance, Integrity and Human Rights, and I am delighted to join all of you in this commemoration.
2. I learn that these activities resonate with this year's theme for Human Rights Day namely "Human Rights 365" as promoted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "Human Rights 365" signifies the

idea that every day is Human Rights Day. This is to celebrate the fundamental proposition in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that each one of us, everywhere, at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights, and that human rights belong equally to each of us and bind us together as a global community with the same ideals and values. It is an attitude each of us must have so that we give due respect to each other and promote peace and harmony.

3. I am pleased to see in your activity calendar that this year's Human Rights Day is not just a one-day celebration. Instead, a number of events are being carried out throughout the week with the aim of enhancing awareness and understanding on human rights in Malaysia. They include, photo and art exhibitions, video competition, public forum, debate, as well as today's Interfaith Panel Discussion which explores harmony in diversity from a human rights based approach.
4. Having said that, let us not forget the significance of 10 December, the date on which the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, affirming its principles as the "common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations". Malaysia, by virtue of being a member of the United Nations since 1957, has subscribed and is committed to uphold the human rights norms and standards enshrined in this Declaration. This can be observed in Part II of the Federal Constitution relating to the fundamental liberties of citizens, as well as other provisions which form the basis for the promotion and protection of human rights in Malaysia.
5. In addition to that, being a State Party to three core human rights treaties namely the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Malaysia has undertaken steps to implement its treaty obligations towards ensuring better the country's compliance with the international human rights standards and norms. Among the steps taken include, enactment of specific laws such as Child Act 2001 and Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, as well as review of domestic legislation, including the amendment to Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution in 2001 to ensure that no discrimination in any law against citizens on the grounds of gender. This amendment is consistent with Malaysia's obligations under the CEDAW.
6. As minister for human rights, I note the relative slow pace in which we have taken the lead, both in ASEAN and regionally, in adopting a higher standard by becoming a signatory to more human rights instruments. We have taken to the world stage by taking a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council and will chair ASEAN next year. To be leaders, we need to address this.

7. Malaysia's commitment to uphold fundamental rights and freedoms of all people was also demonstrated through its follow-up steps to the recommendations underlined in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action ("Vienna Declaration"), a significant human rights document solemnly adopted by all UN Member States at the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 in Vienna, Austria.
8. The government also recognises the important role of NGOs in the promotion and protection of human rights and supports a more inclusive policy of closer engagement with the NGOs as partners with the government. In many cases NGOs, with their special competence, can work with the government to resolve issues concerning violation of human rights and to implement sustainable solutions.
9. One of the major steps taken was the establishment of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) in 1999, an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) mandated to promote and protect human rights of people in Malaysia. The Government recognises the vital role of SUHAKAM and will continue to support the Commission to discharge its mandate and functions as a Paris Principles-compliant NHRI effectively. As minister for human rights, I encourage government agencies to directly and actively seek the views and inputs from SUHAKAM. SUHAKAM is not a NGO but a statutory body, established by Parliament to advocate and promote human rights in Malaysia for all Malaysians. They are not a puppet of the government nor are they in opposition to the government. They stand for human rights.
10. The second major step was the Government's decision made in 2010 to develop Malaysia's first National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), one of the key recommendations outlined in the Vienna Declaration for States to improve the promotion and protection of human rights through public policy. This important task is currently placed under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department in which the Legal Affairs Division of the PM's Department (BHEUU) and my office are directly involved in.
11. I take note of the concern raised by some of you on the progress at which the NHRAP is being developed. Let me assure you that the Government treats the drafting of this Plan a matter of priority and will continue to ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders at all stages of the drafting process.
12. The Government is also committed to take a holistic and inclusive approach to human rights in the development of the Plan through the inclusion of sustainable policies related to economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights of all people within the country.

13. A key stakeholder to realise human rights is the police force and other enforcement agencies. Accordingly we are working with them to empower their officers with the knowledge, skills and state of the art equipment so that they may complete the transformation into a modern-day police force with modern-day values which necessarily includes human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Before I conclude, allow me to turn to the theme for today's Interfaith Panel Discussion -"Harmony in Diversity: A Human Rights Approach".
15. As a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, Malaysia takes full cognizance of the religious, social and cultural diversities of its communities. Together with the State, each of us should strive to ensure that the respect for social harmony is fully observed and protected. If I may quote Article 1 of the UDHR for a moment, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".
16. Recognition and appreciation of the religious, social and cultural diversities of the various communities in Malaysia would promote greater tolerance, respect and observance for human rights. It is incumbent on us to be guided by these principles in preserving social unity and harmony between different communities, groups, and faiths in our country.
17. Not only as a minister but as a father and now grandfather to 2 and as a Malaysian, I read with dismay that there are those in our country whom teach and propagate extreme beliefs and hatred against other who believe differently and that encourage others to become irresponsible and choose the path of violence and the loss of personal dignities. Whilst we may be tempted to cower in fear or react in anger, we must resist this. I believe that our country is great enough to withstand these extremist. I urge you all to join together as Malaysians to promote dignity of each other, liberty of each other, equality of each other and brotherhood of each other.
18. Let us be continuously inspired by the "1Malaysia" concept championed by our Honourable Prime Minister in 2009 and do our very best to preserve and enhance harmony in diversity towards building a country of ALL human rights for ALL.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Lastly, I would like to wish all of you a fruitful and successful discussion. Looking at the agenda, I am certain that today's discussion will enable us to

better understand harmony in diversity through a human rights lens. After all, the greatness of a nation is measured by how it treats its minorities.

20. It is now my pleasure to officially launch the 2014 Human Rights Week.

Thank you.

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