

RECOGNIZING MINORITY RIGHTS IN A DEMOCRACY, 7 NOV 2011

The banning of the Seksualiti Merdeka Festival has brought to the forefront the issue of not just intolerance towards sexual diversity but also the issue of ensuring the protection of minority groups in a democracy.

The Women's Centre for Change, Penang (WCC) would like to highlight that the Federal Constitution (Part II) ensures the protection of the fundamental liberties of citizens. Article 8(1) states that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law. Further more, in a democratic government professing principles of good governance the principle of inclusion of different groups in society is as important as the principles of participation, transparency and accountability. As such the rights of minority groups such as the LGBT community to exist and hold discussions, must be protected, whether or not we agree with their ideas, practices or beliefs.

WCC acknowledges and understands that sexual diversity is an issue which many people find difficult to accept or even discuss, given religious, cultural and hetero-normative influences. However the reality is that sexual diversity exists in our society as it does in other societies around the world. In the course of our work with youth in schools and adults in the community, WCC regularly comes across individuals who are not heterosexual and have suffered censure, isolation and ridicule. These people are a part of our society and they live among us also as teachers, doctors, lawyers etc, contributing to society and the country's development.

How we approach the issue of sexual diversity and the people concerned is a reflection of our ability to cope with such diversity among human beings. Unfortunately what we have witnessed thus far is a regrettable level of intolerance and a worrying level of hatred towards this diversity to the extent that a platform for discussion has now been banned, police intimidation is being used and the potential for aggression has been raised.

WCC is deeply concerned over the constant attempts to regulate thought and behavior towards a particular moral ideology which does not allow for different points of view or expression. It is extremely worrying when discussion of issues which are deemed controversial, is not allowed. As such WCC views the banning of Seksualiti Merdeka Festival as unnecessary and unjust. The ban has caused us to lose an opportunity to better understand the issues and difficulties faced by the LGBT community.

The importance of understanding diversity and working for a more just and humane society where rights are recognised and differences accepted and respected, is

indicative of the progress of our nation. This can only come about by allowing spaces for respectful discussion and when necessary, an agreement to disagree. WCC urges that as we develop as a democratic nation, we not only learn to understand and allow for differing points of view but to recognize minority rights as well.

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