

Malaysia: Upcoming Rally in Support of Anwar Ibrahim Must Be Allowed to Proceed Peacefully

(Bangkok, 6 March 2015) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) today urged the Malaysian government to ensure that the “*Kita Lawan*” rally tomorrow (7 March 2015), organised by the opposition and civil society groups to express solidarity with opposition leader and former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, will be allowed to proceed peacefully. Anwar was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment on trumped up sodomy charges. The expression of support by the regional human rights group for the rally and the right of Malaysians’ to peaceful assembly came in response to the police’s warning that the rally was deemed “illegal” and that the organisers will be charged under the Peaceful Assembly Act.

“The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is the cornerstone of every democratic society for citizens to express their concerns on public affairs. The Dang Wangi police chief’s threat to charge organisers of tomorrow’s rally plainly demonstrates the police force’s ignorance on the rule of law, especially since the Court of Appeal had in April 2014 declared Article 9 of the Peaceful Assembly Act unconstitutional,” said Evelyn Balais-Serrano, the Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

On 10 February 2015, the Malaysian Federal Court upheld the conviction of Anwar Ibrahim on sodomy charges under the Penal Code. The decision of the Federal Court has been heavily criticised by local, regional and international human rights groups as “politically-motivated” and falling below basic international fair trial standards. There has since been a series of arrests and investigations under the Sedition Act and the Penal Code against those who have criticised the court’s decision and the lack of independence and impartiality of the Malaysian judicial system, increasing the already rising number of persecutions targeted against government critics in a wave of crackdown on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly by the Malaysian government since the last couple of years.

“The Malaysian authorities must respect the right to peaceful assembly as it is guaranteed under Article 10 of the Federal Constitution. The organisers and demonstrators must not be arrested, charged or investigated for merely exercising their Constitutional and internationally-recognised right. We strongly urge the police to allow the rally to proceed peacefully, instead of making threats or taking actions to disrupt it,” stressed Balais-Serrano.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organizations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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