

TEMPLATE Version 2: For Human Rights groups, NGOs, Civil society organizations

Please write protest letters to the Government of Malaysia and the police department to express your strongest condemnation and concern over the recent police investigation of SIS based on the six police reports made against our organisation.

SAMPLE LETTER

[Letterhead of your organization]

[Date]

Dear,

Silencing Freedom of Expression in Malaysia

We have noted from various media reports that on February 25th 2010, the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS) has lodged a police report against Sisters in Islam (SIS) because of SIS' press statement on the caning of three Muslim women that was announced to have taken place on February 9th 2010. This report by MAIS is one of six lodged against SIS and also against P. Gunasegaram, Managing Editor of the Malaysian newspaper, *The Star* for his article 'Persuasion not Compulsion' on February 19th 2010.

We understand that the police have already begun an investigation of SIS under Section 298(A) of the Penal Code **for "causing, etc., disharmony, disunity, or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will, or prejudicing, etc., the maintenance of harmony or unity, on grounds of religion"**. It concerns us deeply that the police are investigating a legitimate action by a civil society organization such as SIS.

It sets a bad precedent, one that shall only encourage a further deterioration of public civic culture in a democratizing society such as Malaysia. It undermines freedom of speech and narrows the public space for legitimate discussion, debate and dissent on matters of public interest. This trend towards a growing intolerance for differing opinions in Malaysia, especially about religion, must be halted if Malaysia wants to remain a democracy and plans to sit as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In countries like Malaysia where Islam is used as a source of law and public policy, this official understanding of religion will have a pervasive impact on the public and private lives of every citizen. Consequently, the right to hold and express an opinion on these matters cannot be exclusively exercised by that small minority who claim the unilateral right to define and express authoritative views to which others must silently defer. In a modern state these are matters of legitimate interest and concern to all citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Every citizen accordingly has the right to speak publicly about such issues, and even to question the wisdom and propriety of the state's recourse to punitive measures. All

questions about the nature and structure of the state and about the operation of its legal institutions are the legitimate business, equally, of all its citizens.

The state and all its legal and policing instrumentalities must recognize and uphold that right, not seek to restrict it, nor shelter those who resort to intimidatory tactics to silence others.

Yours sincerely,

[Name & Designation]

Your protest letters should be sent to:-

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