

**TEMPLATE Version 3: For Public Intellectuals, Scholars, Academics & Activists---
Muslim & Non-Muslim / of other Faith or None**

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 organisation]

[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 the 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 is to maintain its reputation as a modern, progressive Muslim nation and a model multi-ethnic society in which diverse and plural religious communities co-exist in peace and harmony.

The right to hold and express an opinion on these matters cannot be restricted to Muslims alone, nor can it be exclusively exercised on their behalf by that small minority among them 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. The state acts in the name of all its citizens. When it

assumes the right to punish, in hitherto unprecedented ways this changes and may adversely affect the nature of citizenship for all its citizens.

Every citizen has the right to speak publicly about such issues and even to question the wisdom and propriety of the state's recourse to such punitive measures. "Questioning" or having differing view is *not* a criminal offence in any reputable modern syariah law jurisdiction.

In the modern world all questions about the nature and structure of the state, about the character and tone of its legal system, and about the operation of its legal institutions are the legitimate business, equally, of all the state's citizens, without individual or broad categorical exception.

Therefore all citizens are entitled to hold, voice, and promote their own views about whether an incremental or piecemeal recourse by the state to punitive measures is in the general public and national interest. The state and all its legal and policing instrumentalities must recognize and uphold that right, not seek to restrict it or shelter those who through recourse to intimidation would do so.

Yours sincerely,

[Name & Designation]

Your protest letters should be sent to:-

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Y.A.B. TAN SRI DATO' SERI ABD KHALID BIN IBRAHIM

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