



WE, the undersigned civil society groups (CSGs), call upon the Election Commission (EC) to allow Sarawakians in overseas West Malaysia, Sabah, and even in different regions within Sarawak to vote by postal ballots in the coming Sarawak elections.

This is legally possible by the EC's own admission and only requires a longer campaign period, which should be a minimum of 21 days considering the geographical spread of Sarawak constituencies.

Postal voting would enable some 50,000-200,000 Sarawakians – according to different estimates - to vote without taking leave and spending hundreds of ringgit to return home. Sabah faces the same problem too.

In the 2006 Sarawak state elections, the average turnout of its 71 seats was a pathetic 61.62%. In the 2008 federal elections, Sarawak had the nation's lowest turnout, at average of 58.16% for its 31 seats while Sabah's 25 seats yielded 63.97%, in sharp contrast with the average turnout of 76.97% for West Malaysia's 165 seats. If the West Malaysia's 76.97% turnout was a reasonable benchmark, then by the same calculation, some 172,000 Sarawakians did not vote in the last elections.

The effective disfranchisement of the Sarawakian diaspora and out-of-town voters – who are higher educated, better exposed and more informed in average – has artificially preserved the conservative electoral outlook in rural Sarawak.

The EC Deputy Chairman Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad has revealed in Kuching on March 19 2010 that the EC has employed the Subregulation (3) (1) (f) in the Elections (Postal Voting) Regulation [EPVR], which reads

“a member of any category of persons designated as postal voters by the Election Commission from time to time by notification in the Gazette” to give police spouses, who are otherwise not entitled, to vote by postal ballots.

We hold that if police spouses are allowed to vote by postal ballots, then the out-of-town Sarawakians will have stronger reasons to be entitled to such facility, unless the EC has an agenda to register police spouses as postal voters and to suppress the vote of Sarawakians.

The EC can set up a few polling centres in Klang Valley, Johor, Penang and Sabah where many Sarawakians reside and a polling centre each for all other states and all overseas missions. The EC can even set up polling centres in major towns in Sarawak for voters from other regions in the state.

The postal ballots will then be counted by the voters' home constituencies and the totals be added to the ordinary ballots cast in those constituencies.

This is perfectly practicable for the coming Sarawak elections. The granting of postal voting rights to outof-town Sarawakians requires only a notification in the Gazette, which is published fortnightly. The EC can then allow a week for interested Sarawakians to apply.

In principle, postal voting should be made available to all with valid grounds and mandatory to none. When polling centres at embassies and consulates of our neighbouring countries have

been opened for many years to allow their citizens abroad to vote, Malaysia should not be left behind.

Postal ballots for Sarawakian voters do not need month-long inspection and approval process for new registrations. This is because those registered for postal ballots under Subregulation (3)(1)(f) of EVPR remains on the ordinary voter list like other temporary voter groups such as election workers, EC commissioners and civil servants who are out of country temporarily on polling day.

Only absent voters – military voters and their spouses (by choice), civil servants overseas and their spouses, tertiary students overseas and their spouses – and police voters need to be placed under a separate list of postal voters, as stipulated by Subregulation 6(2) of the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations.

The undersigned groups:

1. Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC)

2. Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections 2.0 (BERSIH 2.0)
3. Community Action Network (CAN)
4. Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM)
5. Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)
6. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH)
7. LLG Cultural Development Centre (LLG)
8. Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST)
9. Malaysian Election Observers Network (MEO-Net)
10. Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture (MADPET)
11. National Institute for Democracy and Electoral Integrity(NIEI)
12. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (Empower)

13. Persatuan Masyarakat Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan (PERMAS)

14. Pusat Komas

15. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)

16. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)