

10 Years After Bersih 2 Rally: The Work to Build Our Democracy Continues



On this day, 10 years ago, approximately 50,000 ordinary Malaysians gathered in the streets of Kuala Lumpur to demand clean and fair elections. Many took a great personal risk to participate in the rally – gassed, chased, beaten up, or arrested by the police. We will never forget people like Allahyarham Baharuddin Ahmad, Aunty Bersih, Pak Samad, and many more unsung heroes – some of whom are no longer with us. It is in their spirit that we must carry on the work to protect and improve democracy in Malaysia. The following were the eight demands made in the Bersih 2 rally:

1. Clean the electoral roll
2. Reform postal vote
3. Use indelible ink
4. Free & fair access to media
5. Minimum 21 days campaign period
6. Strengthen public institutions
7. Stop corruption

8. Stop dirty politics

While not all of our goals have been achieved, the Malaysian people should be proud of how far we have come. The 14th General Election enabled a peaceful transition of power for the first time in Malaysia's history, followed by installation of a new set of Election Commissioners. Since the new team took over, they have improved on the processes of conducting elections, started the process of cleaning up the electoral roll and engaged more with civil society organisations and other stakeholders. An Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) was established with a two-year mandate to explore all areas of reform needed to make our electoral system more robust and fair. Unlike previously, BERSIH 2.0 has been in multiple public dialogues and engagement with the Election Commission and was represented in the ERC to push for electoral reforms. On the table is a review of the current First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) election system, delineation, voters registration, election management body reform, caretaker government, voters education, political financing and all related legal amendments needed. Plans are also underway to lower the voting age to 18, releasing a block of another 4 million voters by GE15 and implementing automatic voters registration.

Our work has not ended, it probably never will. Like you, we are not satisfied with the slow pace of reforms. We acknowledge that things have not turned out the way voters imagined it to be. But progress is not linear and cynicism is not a solution. We do a disservice to ourselves if we give up on our democracy. From day one, BERSIH 2.0 is clear about our role as an electoral watchdog. We have expanded our scope of work to include spreading public education, monitoring elections, conducting research for policies and legislation related to elections and democracy, and lobbying key legislators and stakeholders to enact meaningful and concrete change.

The Bersih 2 rally and the subsequent protests have normalized protest as a legitimate action to express the Rakyat's sentiments. At the same time, we are never reckless when it comes to organising big rallies especially when it concerns the health and safety of the participants. We reiterate that holding peaceful rallies are never, and can never be off the table, in a parliamentary democracy.

To celebrate and honor the 10th year anniversary of the historic Bersih 2 rally on 9th of July 2011, we call upon our supporters and volunteers to:

1) Share your stories through #KisahBersih709 or #BersihStories709, an oral history Campaign, which runs throughout July. 2) Wear yellow to commemorate the protest and share your pictures on social media. 3) Join our programs related to Bersih 2 rally's 10th anniversary, starting with tonight's webinar featuring the past and present Bersih chairpersons.

The people that showed up on 9 July 2011 in Kuala Lumpur and other cities globally saw that democracy manifest itself in the rakyat. A rally is simultaneously an event, a space, a community, a democratic ideal, and a sense of belonging which contribute to political socialization and civic participation.

BERSIH 2.0 once again thanks the Rakyat for their courage and support for the cause of free and fair elections and democracy shown on the 9th of July 2011. We must continue to be vigilant to work on Malaysian democracy. Let us always remember the moment when thousands of Malaysians sang *Negaraku* together, and how that made us feel. We will carry this

spirit forward, till the fire next time.

Hidup, Hidup! Hidup, Rakyat!

Released by, The Steering Committee of BERSIH 2.0