CRACKDOWNS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS SYMPTOMATIC OF A FAILING DEMOCRACY

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH 2.0) views with grave concern in the last two days various crackdowns by the Malaysian police (PDRM) on social activists who raised issues of public concerns and ordinary Malaysians who expressed their desperation during this health and economic crisis.

The investigation of Freedom Film Network's (FFN) Director Anna Har and cartoonist Amin Landak by the Malaysian police (PDRM) of Bukit Aman in relation to a short film they released recently about the torture of a boy and his two friends while in police custody. The CEO of Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy, Azrul Mohd Khalib is also being investigated for a tweet he made last year expressing his concern over the use of data from MySejahtera app for law enforcement.

They are being investigated under Section 233 of the Communication and Multimedia Act for allegedly sharing menacing and offensive contents, and Section 500 and 505B of the Penal Code for criminal defamation and publishing contents with intent to cause fear and alarm among the public.

Media reports of police ordering villagers in Kuantan to take down their white flags also raise concern. The #BenderaPutih (WhiteFlag) movement arose as a way to identify and help those who are in dire need due to the current Full Movement Control Order (FMCO) where millions of people have lost income and for most, the ability to feed themselves. Their expression of desperation are viewed by some politicians as an embarrassment but for caring Malaysians, it is a means of supporting each other during this time of crisis.

BERSIH 2.0 views these and many other recent crackdowns on people who are exercising their constitutional rights to express their views and situation as another symptom of a failing democracy. The declaration of emergency on the pretext of fighting COVID-19 by the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government in January has already thrown Malaysia into a state of authoritarianism, and now the growing intolerance driven by Government's insecurity and paranoia moves the nation further down the slippery slope.

We call on the PDRM to cease immediately all intimidations of activists and people who are facing desperate situations. The call to reconvene Parliament, the House of representatives of the people, has come from many quarters, including the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Malay Rulers. It is imperative that the Prime Minister acts to restore our democracy by ending the Emergency and convening Parliament immediately.

If the government continues to ignore the plight of the people and the police continue to use high-handed means to stifle any legitimate expressions, the possibility of a total breakdown of civil order cannot be ruled out when people are hungry and angry.

Statement issued by:

The Steering Committee of BERSIH 2.0