

COMPULSORY QUARANTINE FOR SABAH RETURNEES MAY FURTHER SUPPRESS SABAHANS' RIGHT TO VOTE AND UNDERSCORES THE URGENT NEED FOR POSTAL/ABSENTEE VOTING

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0) refers to the Health Minister's comment today that he will be discussing with the special ministerial meeting on the Movement Control Order and the National Security Council (NSC), the need to impose compulsory quarantine for all returnees to the Peninsula from the Sabah state election. This is in view of the latest COVID-19 outbreak in Lahad Datu.

Bersih 2.0 is of the view that any imposition of compulsory 14-day quarantine of returnees from Sabah would further discourage Sabahans who are intending to return home to vote from doing so. The cost of quarantine would be overly burdensome to these Sabahans as this would be on top of the high cost of flying home to vote.

This would also affect politicians, party workers, SPR officials & workers, and NGO observers who will be traveling to Sabah to be involved in the various aspects of the election. If compulsory quarantine is required for all without exception, this could have wider implications on the functioning of these institutions and organisations beyond the election.

We call on the Health Minister and NSC to give very careful consideration before imposing a 14-day quarantine on all returnees from Sabah, given that the outbreaks in Lahad Datu and Tawau are confined to prisons there. If needed, the EC should tighten further the SOP for the conduct of the election in Lahad Datu and Tawau areas in order to ensure that the outbreak there is well-contained.

The pandemic further underscores the urgent need for the Election Commission (EC) to provide postal or absentee voting for voters who due to livelihood and studies are unable to live within or near their voting constituencies. We call on the EC to give us a definite roadmap for the implementation of postal voting for all out-of-region voters. This must be done before the next federal and state elections, especially before the upcoming Sarawak state election.

Failure to allow postal or absentee voting for Sarawakian voters would amount to vote suppression, whether it is intentional or not and If this cannot be implemented before the Sarawak state election due by September 2021. This can be considered a blatant insult to the Malaysia Project after 57 years and the Sarawak people if the EC, the Executive and the Parliament take so lightly the effective disenfranchisement of Malaysians from Sarawak who have to leave their home for education and employment opportunity if they can't work out a timely solution.

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