

## Death Threats Against Human Rights Defenders Must Be Addressed

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) stands in solidarity with Maria Chin Abdullah, the chair of BERSIH 2.0, and denounces in the strongest terms the death threats made against her.

Mohd Ali Baharom aka Ali Tinju allegedly said to a *Free Malaysia Today* reporter, among other things, that Maria may “no longer walk on this earth” and that there would be an “ambush”. He later claimed to have been misquoted, but a recording and transcript published by *FMT* appear to prove otherwise.<sup>1</sup> The phrases uttered by Mohd Ali Baharom, including “Don’t challenge us or we will make it so that her legs point upwards and her head points downward to the ground” (“*Jangan cabar kami nanti kami akan buat kaki dia ke atas, kepala ke bawah jalan*”), are direct and clear threats of violence against Maria.

We note that this is not the first time Ali Tinju has made public threats of violence. In 2015, he urged a group of people in a gathering at Low Yat Plaza to unite and “attack the DAP Chinese who are rude.” There have also been multiple instances of other violent threats made against Malaysians exercising their fundamental rights, with women being targeted for sexual violence. Prior to the Bersih 4 rally in 2015, extremists warned Chinese-Malaysians against joining the rally and threatened to spill blood. In the same year, journalist Aisyah Tajuddin faced rape and death threats for commenting on a proposed hudud bill in Kelantan. A man threatened to sexually assault activist Datuk Noor Farida Ariffin in a Facebook comment. In none of these cases were there meaningful redress for the people targeted.

JAG is gravely concerned that threats of violence against human rights defenders and those who speak out against the wrongdoings of both State and non-State actors are being tolerated for the purpose of suppressing dissent. Threats are now commonplace as a response to disagreements, and especially against women who have demonstrated leadership and integrity of high standards. These threats also appear to be tolerated by those who are in position to instead protect and promote human rights and equality for all.

We strongly urge Malaysian authorities to publicly condemn threats made against human rights defenders, and for the Malaysian police to disclose updates on the investigation against Ali Tinju for criminal intimidation.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/09/21/ali-tinju-not-misquoted-heres-the-recording/>