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GBM welcomes Negeri Sembilan new regulation on conversion to Islam

Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia welcomes the move by Negeri Sembilan State Government to introduce new regulations to ensure those who wish to convert to Islam dissolve their marriage prior to conversion, and make a statutory declaration on their conversion to Islam.

While the details of the new law have yet to be released, these measures are a positive step in the right direction within the constraints of the contemporary political reality.

Hopefully, such measures would be followed by constructive, rational and inclusive dialogues to forge long-term consensus for legal solutions that are more in line with individual freedom of conscience, family ties and social harmony.

We recognise that these amendments will help prevent unfortunate occurrences such as the body-snatching of deceased persons who allegedly converted to Islam without the knowledge of their families; the disputes regarding child custody of children who were converted to Islam without the knowledge or consent of a parent and the issue of maintenance of non-Muslim former spouse.

Within the present socio-political constraints, we agree with the Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar, Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan that the proposed regulations would not only strengthen the Administration of the Religion of Islam (Negeri Sembilan) Enactment 2003, but would also avoid controversy. Most importantly, it would ensure that Islam is not used as an irresponsible convert to escape duties and responsibilities, and that the principles of fairness, justice and compassion as promoted by the religion is adhered to.

However, there remains pertinent concerns that require further resolution such as the welfare and interest of the minors and interfaith marriages. The new legislation should include a procedure to ensure that any conversion of a minor should only be allowed under the informed consent of both parents. While the Federal Government, through a decision on a Cabinet meeting in 2009, has banned unilateral conversion of minor, the decision is yet to be

implemented as legislation of religious matter falls under the purview of State Government.

We urge other States to legislate the state law with similar measures to ensure fairness and justice being done to family of Muslim converts and to protect the sanctity of Islam from being tainted by a few unscrupulous individuals.

Issued by the Executive Council, Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GBM)