

LGBT Malaysians uphold democracy not because we are militants, but because we are citizens

We are appalled and puzzled by the absurd, irresponsible and inaccurate claims made by the Centre for Human Rights Research and Advocacy (CENTHRA) chief executive Azril Mohd Amin regarding LGBT persons in two news articles dated 27 November 2016.

In both articles, CENTHRA irresponsibly labeled LGBT persons and groups as 'militant' simply for participating in Bersih 5 and supporting the call for free and fair elections. LGBT persons and groups stand in solidarity with diverse groups and all people living in Malaysia calling for good, transparent and accountable governance in our country. In the articles, CENTHRA also criticized BERSIH for allowing LGBT persons to participate in the rallies. We find the call to isolate and police LGBT groups and persons deeply troubling.

The fact is, LGBT persons are often denied some, if not all, of fundamental human rights because of our sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Many LGBT persons face gross discrimination and violence within homes, schools, workplace, hospitals, and public sectors simply for being who we are. CENTHRA's views increase risks and challenges for LGBT persons to seek assistance and access justice when violence occurs.

While more and more family members now accept their LGBT children, they find it difficult to come out in support of their children or family members due to the kind of discrimination and stigma that individuals and groups like CENTHRA espouse. Anecdotal evidence and global trends show that LGBT persons are more vulnerable to depression, stress, suicidal ideation and attempts than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.

How else could LGBT persons seek justice and create a better Malaysia if not by speaking up and participating in democracy? CENTHRA, however, is suggesting that LGBT persons cannot be seen, be in solidarity, participate and exercise our constitutional rights. For CENTHRA, LGBT persons should remain hidden, silent and accept the gross discrimination and violence that we experience. The fact that there is consistent resistance to LGBT persons whenever we take a visible stance demonstrates deep levels of homophobia and transphobia that need to be addressed through meaningful engagements with LGBT persons and in accordance to international standards of human rights.

CENTHRA's views on human rights are selective and do not fully promote the principles of universality, non-discrimination and equality of human rights. We remind CENTHRA that Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings (without exception) are born free and equal. Article 5 of the Federal Constitution guarantees fundamental liberties to all persons. It is important for CENTHRA to understand that their skewed views on human rights misinform the public and reinforce the harmful notion that LGBT persons are a threat. We are extremely concerned that these claims will increase the vulnerability and risks of LGBT persons and human rights defenders to discrimination and violence.

We remind CENHRA that Malaysia is a member of the United Nations and is obligated to uphold international human rights standards. We also call for meaningful dialogue and engagement with the LGBT community to promote understanding instead of misinformed condemnation, moral posturing and fear mongering.