

Prosecute Those who Make Death Threats against Human Rights Defenders and Their Families

Joint Action Group for Gender Equality

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The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality is outraged and appalled at the death threats made against Maria Chin Abdullah and her three sons, Ambiga Sreenevasan, and Mandeep Karpall.

The threats, sent through a chat application, comprise of digitally-edited images that appear to show all those named above kneeling with a masked man dressed all in black, standing over them and holding a knife to their throats. The images also show Bersih 5 t-shirts superimposed on the six individuals. The images are reminiscent of photos and footage of Daesh executing hostages.

We have already seen a series of violence targeting the organisers and supporters of Bersih 5, and even journalists covering the nationwide convoy are not spared. These images mark a clear escalation of violence, with family members also being targeted with death threats. That it has escalated to such an extent is not an accident or an outlier: political violence against those with differing viewpoints or accused of being “anti-government” is extremely worrying as it appears that it is increasingly tolerated in this country, particularly since 2013 and the last general election.

We remind the Malaysian government that it supported a United Nations General Assembly resolution in December 2015 on protecting human rights defenders. Among other things, the resolution calls on accountability for attacks against human rights defenders and their families, and affirms the obligations of the State to promote, protect, and fulfil its human rights obligations. The resolution also expressed a specific concern over systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders, recognising that they face gendered forms of violence.

JAG calls on the Malaysian government, the Royal Malaysian Police Force, and other agencies to do their duty with conscientiousness and impartiality. Members of the Cabinet and political leaders from all parties, regardless of ideology, need to unequivocally condemn the violence and death threats. The violence must be arrested. Failure to do so can be interpreted as tolerance by those in power of the type of militant politics and politics of fear and intimidation that are currently pervasive in this country, designed to target human rights defenders, voices of dissent and freedom of expression and assembly and association.