

Press statement

Malaysia: More than 1500 arrested, Brutal Crackdown on Bersih 2.0 Rally Condemned

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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development strongly condemns the brutal crackdown today on the peaceful rally of Bersih 2.0, a coalition of 62 civil society organizations that is campaigning for electoral reform in Malaysia. More than 1,500 have been arrested, including 16 minors. Among those detained are Maria Chin Abdullah, committee member of Bersih 2.0 and a well-known women's rights activist and several members of parliament from various opposition parties, namely Tian Chua, Nurul Izzah Anwar and Fuziah Salleh of the People's Justice Party (PKR), Mohamad Sabu, Mahfuz Omar and Salahuddin Ayub of the Pan Islamic Party (PAS).

Thousands turned up in the rally of Bersih 2.0 in Kuala Lumpur today despite the pre-rally harassment, intimidation and arrest launched by the police in the past two weeks against the leaders and members of Bersih 2.0. Tear gas, baton and water canon laced with chemicals were used widely and indiscriminately against the peaceful protestors.

We are also extremely alarmed that there have been reports that alleged police violent conducts on the protestors. It is reported that tear gas canisters were fired directly into the crowd and injured many. One of the members of parliament, Khalid Samad, was reportedly hit by tear gas canister at the back of his head. Protestors were kicked and manhandled during the arrest process. Among the injured including Anwar Ibrahim, the parliamentary opposition leader, who suffered injury on his head and knees. Such police brutality must not be condoned. We demand the police officers that committed such abuse of powers be investigated and brought to justice.

The call of Bersih 2.0 to reform the electoral system is a legitimate demand. Bersih 2.0 has also sought dialogue with the Election Commission on their recommendations of electoral reform. As the Election Commission refused to improve the electoral system to ensure free and fair election, it is perfectly legitimate for Bersih 2.0 to exercise the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly to highlight the flaws in the electoral system and the demands for electoral reform.

The right of the Malaysian citizen to political participation can only be ensured through a free and fair election. A democratic society would also respect and protect the right to participate in any peaceful assembly, such as the one called by Bersih 2.0. The refusal of the Malaysian government to address the issue through dialogue, the reversal of decision of allowing the Bersih 2.0 to hold the rally in a stadium and the crackdown on the rally today only goes to show that the Malaysian government had no intention at all to allow any democratic challenge to its powers. Instead, the police force is abused to maintain its power.

We demand the Malaysian government to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the right to political participation. We urge the Malaysian government to release all detainees immediately and unconditionally, especially the 16 minors. For those still in detention, we call on the government to ensure the physical and mental integrity of the protestors while in police custody and allow for immediate and unconstrained access to lawyers, family and

medical treatment for all detainees.

For inquiry, please contact:

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