

Malaysia investigates women who discussed their 'dehijabbing'

Sunday 28 April 2019, by [ELLIS-PETERSEN Hannah](#) (Date first published: 18 April 2019).

Move by Islamic authorities condemned as attempt to 'intimidate women activists'

Three women in [Malaysia](#) who held an event discussing their decision to stop wearing the hijab are being investigated by Malaysian Islamic authorities.

The event, hosted over the weekend at the Gerakbudaya bookshop in the Petaling Jaya area, was held to mark the launch of Unveiling Choice, a book documenting the author and activist Maryam Lee's decision to stop wearing the hijab.

The event, Malay Women and Dehijabbing, featured a three-hour panel discussion between Maryam and two other Malaysian women, Mohani Niza and Dian Sofia, who had also decided to no longer wear the hijab.

Maryam said the panel was an "intellectual discourse based on the women's lived realities", after which the audience had left "on a good note", but a backlash on social media began to build that had "distorted" the content discussed, mainly by those who had not attended the talk.

It caught the attention of the religious affairs minister, Mujahid Yusof Rawa, who expressed concern about the event and prompted the Islamic authorities of Selangor to investigate it in a "fair and just manner".

On Tuesday morning, Jabatan Agama [Islam](#) Selangor religious officers visited the bookshop, which is owned by the publisher of Unveiling Choice, and demanded to see copies of the book and get accounts of the event from staff.

The three women said that beyond the religious affairs minister making a public statement about the investigation, they had not been informed of what action was being taken against them or the publisher.

However, in a joint statement Maryam, Mohani and Dian said they were "unequivocal that there has been no transgression of Malaysian laws".

"We condemn this unnecessary investigation as abuse of power to harass and intimidate women activists who are speaking up on issues affecting women, and organisers for intellectual discussions that do not serve the status quo," they said.

Malaysia, where about 60% of the population is Muslim, has long been held up as moderate and relatively progressive. However, in recent years there has been a rise in Islamic conservatism, emboldened by the growing influence of the Malaysian Islamic party, which recently has pushed for elements of sharia law to be implemented throughout the north-eastern state of Kelantan.

In September [two women were publicly caned](#) after the north-eastern state of Terengganu's sharia high court found them guilty of trying to have sex with each other.

Latheefa Koya, executive director of Lawyers for Liberty, said women in Malaysia should not be investigated for discussing their religious choices.

"It does not mean those who attended the forum would lose their faith," she said. "Let a woman think freely and choose whether they want to wear the hijab or not."

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The Guardian

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