

ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum: Malaysian Government Undermines ASEAN Processes

**ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum
Media Statement, 9 May 2014
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Malaysian civil society organisations are appalled that, ahead of the ASEAN Summit on 11th May 2014, the Malaysian government has objected to the Malaysian civil society delegate due to attend the Interface Meeting between Civil Society and the ASEAN Heads of State. We are further dismayed by news that the Cambodian and Singaporean governments have also rejected the civil society Interface Delegates from both countries respectively.

The Interface Meeting is a platform for ASEAN civil society representatives and the heads of state attending the Summit to engage with each other on critical issues confronting Southeast Asia. This meeting has been a regular occurrence since 2005. Civil society delegates to the Interface Meetings are identified through national processes among civil society organisations that participated in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum each year, which in 2014 saw 3,000 attendees representing vast communities across the Southeast Asian region including Malaysia.

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)'s Executive Director, Maria Chin Abdullah, was selected as the Interface Delegate for Malaysia through this process. We are shocked at the Malaysian government's objection as they had previously supported her engagement in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) which was held in Jakarta on 29th April 2014. Why is she suddenly deemed objectionable? We have received word that the Malaysian government is seeking to plant its own choice as a substitute delegate for the Interface Meeting.

This is an affront to the civil society who has worked hard in our engagement with the ASEAN processes.

In the 2014 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum, ASEAN civil society spoke in one voice in laying down the objectives for the Interface Meeting. Namely, that the Interface between civil society and heads of State should satisfy the principles of self-determination or self-selection, mutual respect, meaningful dialogue, and bringing peoples' voices and advocacy. If the governments of Malaysia, Cambodia, and Singapore were to impose their own substitutes as civil society Interface Delegates, these governments will be breaking the principles of the Interface. This renders any engagement between civil society and the heads of State in ASEAN a mere public relations exercise.

Released by:

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