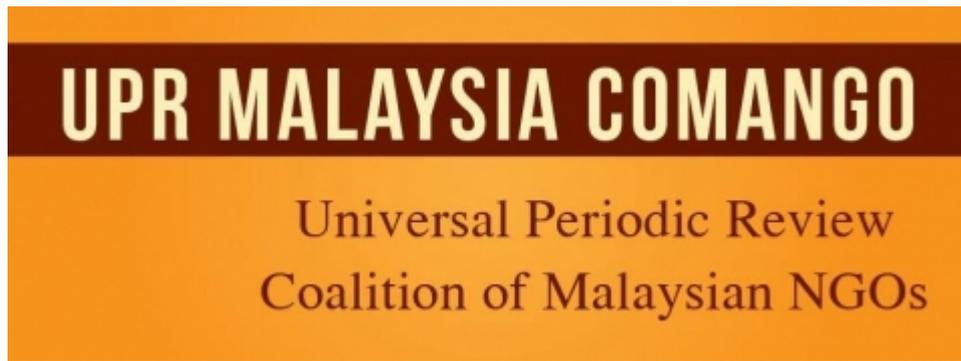


Malaysia must reverse ban against leading human rights coalition

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(Geneva) - Malaysian authorities should immediately reverse a ban issued against a leading coalition of human rights organisations, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

On 8 January 2014 the Malaysian Home Ministry issued a statement that it had declared the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs (COMANGO) to be illegal on the basis that it 'deviates from the Islamic faith' through its support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. The Ministry further justified the ban on the basis that members of the coalition are not registered under the Malaysian Societies Act 1966.

'The move to ban COMANGO is a clear violation of the rights to freedom of association and assembly,' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

ISHR is particularly concerned at reports that the ban was issued in response to COMANGO submitting a report to the UN Human Rights Council on Malaysia's human rights record in March 2013.

'Reprisals against human rights defenders and NGOs in retaliation for their efforts to expose and seek accountability for national-level human rights violations on the international stage is a clear breach of international law,' Mr Lynch said.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted with the support of Malaysia in 1998, explicitly protects the rights to freedom of expression and association and the right to communicate without interference with the UN.

ISHR is also deeply concerned that the ban has been justified on the basis that COMANGO advocates for LGBT rights and has been critical of Malaysia's human rights record in this regard.

'The right to non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, like the right to non-discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs or practices, is a fundamental principle of international human rights law. It is incumbent on Malaysia to extend the same rights and protections to LGBT persons as it does to adherents to the Islamic faith.'

In addition to calling on Malaysian authorities to immediately reverse the ban issued against COMANGO, ISHR also calls on Malaysia to:

1. Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ensure that the rights to freedom of association, expression and non-discrimination are enshrined in domestic law;
2. Cease and desist from any acts of reprisal or intimidation against persons or organisations cooperating with the UN and enact specific legislation which enshrines the right to communicate with the UN and to be protected in doing so; and
3. Recognise the right to non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and protect and support human rights defenders and organisations which advocate for LGBT rights.

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