

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Malaysia: Drop investigations against members of the Malaysian Bar**

The Malaysian authorities must drop sedition investigations against four lawyers of the Malaysian Bar, in connection with an approved motion from their organisation that called for the resignation of the Attorney General. These investigations are the most recent effort by the authorities to harass and intimidate critics of the government and undermine the independence of the Bar, the sole body representing practising lawyers in Peninsular Malaysia.

On 19 March 2016, a motion was tabled at the Annual General Meeting of the Malaysian Bar calling on Attorney General Mohamed Apandi Ali, to resign over his handling of a corruption case involving Prime Minister Najib Razak being linked to the misappropriation of hundreds of millions of US dollars from the state-owned investment company 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). The motion was approved by 744 members who voted in favour and 62 against, while 12 abstained.

Following the motion, on 31 March 2016, four lawyers Karen Cheah, the Secretary of the Malaysian Bar, Charles Hector Fernandez, Francis Pereira and Shanmugam Ramasamy were hauled up by the police to record their statements. All four are currently under investigation under Section 4(1)(a) of the 1948 Sedition Act.

Amnesty International believes that every individual, including lawyers, have the right to express their ideas, discuss issues of public interest and participate in public debates without fear of reprisal. Laws that impose undue restrictions on accessing public information and that are used to intimidate individuals from exposing wrongdoing by public officials are incompatible with the right to freedom of expression.

Since the 2013 general elections, the Sedition Act - a draconian law from the colonial era - has become the favoured tool of repression by Prime Minister Najib Razak's government to silence, harass and lock up hundreds of critics in Malaysia. Over the last year, the law has been used to target anyone speaking out about allegations of corruption involving the Prime Minister.

Amnesty International calls on the Malaysian authorities to urgently repeal the Sedition Act, and to quash convictions against any individual sentenced under the act simply for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression. The authorities must ensure that they are immediately and unconditionally released.

The investigation against these four lawyers comes amidst a wider crackdown on freedom of expression and political dissent in Malaysia. A recent report by Amnesty International highlights how at least 91 people, including human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, academics, and opposition politicians were investigated, arrested or charged in 2015 alone under the 1948 Sedition Act. Other laws that have been used to silence critical voices include the 1984 Printing Presses and Publications Act, the 1998 Multimedia and Communications Act, the 2012 Peaceful Assembly Act and the 2012 Security Offences (Special Measures) Act.

Amnesty International calls on the Malaysian government to take immediate steps to repeal or amend all laws that impose unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and bring them into compliance with international human rights law and standards.