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Malaysia: End harassment of anti-corruption campaigners

Amnesty International called on the Malaysian authorities to end all forms of harassment and intimidation against Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram), a human rights group which had successfully petitioned for a French judicial review of corruption allegations against Malaysian officials.

Amnesty International made the statement in response to what appears to be a concerted, multi-departmental government campaign against Suaram, one of Malaysia's leading human rights groups.

On 18 September 2012, Domestic Trade Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced that Suaram and its company affiliate, Suara Inisiatif Sdn Bhd., faced legal action by several government agencies.

Ismail announced that the Registrar of Societies will take legal action against Suaram and Suara Inisiatif under the Societies Act 1966. Amnesty International is concerned that this repressive law has been routinely used by Malaysian authorities to curtail freedom of association and clamp down on peaceful dissent. In July 2011, when the electoral-reform coalition Bersih planned a peaceful rally in Kuala Lumpur, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein used his power under the Societies Act to declare it an unlawful organization.

The rights to freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly and association are key human rights provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a host of other internationally agreed instruments.

Ismail also said that Malaysia's central bank, Bank Negara Malaysia, would take action against Suaram. Earlier in September 2012, he had called on the bank to investigate Suaram under the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Act 2001 for receiving funding from foreign-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since then, the authorities have widened their investigations into foreign funding from Suaram to other local NGOs, including Bersih and Lawyers for Liberty, the *New Straits Times* reported on 21 September.

According to the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, organizations have the right "to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights" (Article 13). The Malaysian government should respect Suaram's right as a human rights organization to seek and receive funding, rather than abuse its power to intimidate human rights defenders.

In addition, Domestic Trade Minister Ismail has stated publicly that the Companies Commission of Malaysia had found "misleading accounts" in Suaram's annual report, but he did not provide details on the allegation. He said the Attorney-General's Chamber would decide on charges. Following Ismail's declaration, Suaram and its supporters have lodged eight police reports against the minister, complaining that he had "interfered and influenced" official investigations into the organization.

Amnesty International is concerned that the recent government actions against Suaram appear to be linked to the organization's legitimate work, in particular a corruption case which it has brought before the French courts.

The government began these actions against Suaram four weeks after the organization disclosed new information from documents made available by the French public prosecutor's office, which implicate Malaysian officials in the corruption allegations.

In April 2012, the Tribunal de Grand Instance in Paris began its inquiry into Suaram's allegations that the French naval defence company DCNS had paid 114 million euros as a bribe to Malaysian officials to obtain a contract for two submarines. Suaram had filed the complaint with the French courts in 2009.

On 30 May 2012 [at a press conference in Bangkok](#), Suaram announced that documents which it had obtained as civil plaintiff in the case indicated transfers of money by DCNS to Malaysia's ruling party and an associate of then Defence Minister and current Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Suaram was visited first by the Companies Commission of Malaysia with a notice of inspection on 3 July 2012, and it subsequently produced its accounts for the agency. On 4 September 2012 the Domestic Trade Minister said the accounts were "highly suspicious".