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Malaysian student activist should be released immediately

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Malaysian student activist Adam Adli, who has been arrested solely for peacefully expressing his views.

On 18 May 2013, 13 days following Malaysia's general elections, police arrested and detained student activist Adam Adli, 24, in Kuala Lumpur, for remarks he allegedly had made during a post-election public meeting on 13 May.

Adam Adli, along with other democracy activists reportedly called for a street demonstration to protest alleged electoral fraud during the 5 May elections, the most closely-fought elections since Malaysia's independence.

Adam Adli is currently detained in a police detention facility, undergoing interrogation for allegedly violating section 4(1) of the Sedition Act and section 124(B) of the Penal Code. Credible sources indicate that the student activist was subjected to interrogation from 10 am until 6 pm on 19 and 20 May, with the interrogators repeatedly asking the same questions. Adam Adli has refused to answer the questions in the latter part of the interrogation, telling the police to just watch a video of his speech during the public meeting instead.

The Malaysian government must stop using the Sedition Act and provisions in the Penal Code to stifle people's right to free expression, and it must release all those who have been arrested merely for the peaceful expression of their political beliefs or dissenting opinions.

Section 4(1) of Malaysia's Sedition Act provides that it is a criminal offence to make any oral, printed and published statements or acts with "seditious tendency".

If Adam Adli is found guilty of sedition, he could be imprisoned for up to three years, fined up to RM 5,000 (approximately USD 1,650), or both. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns about the Sedition Act and the way it has been implemented over the years to repress political dissent.

In 2012, Prime Minister Najib announced that he would repeal the Sedition Act.

Section 124(B) of the Penal Code states that "whoever, by any means, directly or indirectly, commits an activity detrimental to parliamentary democracy shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to twenty years."

Section 124(B) is overly broad and vague. It imposes a chilling effect on free expression in violation of Malaysia's constitution and international legal obligations. It gives an unfettered discretion to police officers to arrest and detain a person if in the opinion of the arresting police officer a person is committing an act, which to that police officer is detrimental to parliamentary democracy.

Amnesty International calls on the Malaysian government to repeal section 124(b) of the Penal Code. In addition, it must release Adam Adli from detention immediately and unconditionally. The Malaysian authorities must ensure that peaceful political dissent is protected both in law and practice.