

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Malaysia's crackdown on anti-racism protesters flouts freedom of association**

The Malaysian government's prosecution of 54 anti-racism protestors violates freedom of association and peaceful assembly, Amnesty International said today.

On 4 April, hearings begin for participants in a peaceful rally against racial discrimination, held by Hindraf Makkal Sakthi and its affiliated Human Rights Party in Kuala Lumpur on 27 February.

Hindraf, a nongovernmental organization which advocates for equal rights for Malaysians of Indian origin, was banned as an "unlawful society" in 2008 under the Societies Act.

P. Ramesh, the national secretary of Hindraf, and five others are scheduled to appear in magistrates' court in Ipoh. They have been charged with being members of an "unlawful society" under Section 43 of the Societies Act. If convicted, they face up to three years in prison and a fine of 5,000 ringgit (US\$1,600).

The 1966 Societies Act gives the Home Minister broad powers to declare an organization illegal. It also requires that all organizations register with the authorities, which subordinates freedom of association to government consent. This infringes the right to freedom of association, enshrined in Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The authorities have also charged P. Ramesh under Section 47 of the Societies Act for possessing banners and documents furthering the cause of an outlawed organization. If convicted on this charge, he could face a penalty of two years in prison and a 5,000 ringgit fine. Amnesty International is concerned that this broad provision infringes freedom of expression.

Amnesty International urged the Malaysian Parliament to amend the Societies Act to bring it in line with international human rights standards on freedom of association.

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