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ANFREL condemns arrests, urges Malaysian Government to uphold freedom of assembly, association and expression



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BANGKOK, THAILAND -- On November 18, Malaysian Police officers raided the office of Bersih 2.0, and arrested its chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah, secretariat manager Mandeep Singh, and seven other supporters. The arrests were made on the eve of the November 19 Bersih 5 Rally which was organized to express the clamor for electoral reform and anti-corruption measures.

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) condemns the arrests in the strongest possible manner, and demands for the immediate release of Bersih Chairperson Abdullah and other supporters who are in detention. ANFREL appeals for the Malaysian Government to uphold freedom of assembly, association and expression which are guaranteed by the Constitution and international conventions.

Formed in 2006, Bersih was instrumental in organizing four peaceful assemblies which garnered the support from thousands of Malaysians demanding for democratic reforms, and clean, free and fair elections. At present, at least four members of the Bersih organizing committee are facing criminal charges under Section 124(c), 147, 153 and 511 of the Penal Code and the Sedition Act.

Laws are instituted to protect citizens, and not to persecute citizens. Using legal measures to intimidate activists and suppress dissent not only goes against the basic principles of democracy, but also creates further divide. ANFREL urges the Malaysian Government to unconditionally drop the Special Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) violation charges against BERSIH leaders and supporters.

ANFREL, together with its members all over Asia, expresses its support and solidarity with the Malaysians in their peaceful collective action to demand transparency in government and genuine democratic elections.