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■ PETALING JAYA

No more functions in church

NGO says it will choose 'neutral venues' for future activities

By PEARL LEE

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A NON-GOVERNMENTAL organisation says it will not hold any social function in a church compound in future.

The NGO, Harapan Komuniti, was commenting on the Sultan of Selangor's decision yesterday on the raid by the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (Jais) on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) in Jalan 13/1 here on Aug 3.

Lawyer Datuk Kenny Ng, representing Harapan Komuniti and its four members who were among 12 Muslims detained in the incident, said the NGO was glad the matter has come to an end following months of dispute.

In the incident, police and Jais raided a multi-racial thanksgiving dinner at DUMC organised by Harapan Komuniti, a non-profit organisation helping women, children, HIV/AIDS sufferers and victims of natural disasters, after receiving complaints of an alleged attempt to proselytise Muslims at the function.

"Komuniti Harapan and my four clients are grateful the Sultan of Selangor has brought closure to the matter. All parties are now wiser having learnt from this experience," said Ng.

Asked by *The Malay Mail* whether the group would in future hold social functions at the same venue again, Ng said

it was unlikely.

"Although we have in the past accepted offers to hold functions at places of worship

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as they don't charge for using their hall since it is a non-profit organisation, it looks like we have to be wiser and respectful of all parties in the future," he said.

"We have to choose neutral venues as we don't want any perception problems."

As for the stand taken by the Sultan that Muslims detained during the raid is to attend counseling to "restore their belief and faith in the Religion of Islam", Ng said the four would abide by the Sultan's decree.

"They (the four) are law-abiding citizens and will abide by the law," he said.

Selangor's Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah had, in a statement yesterday, said Jais' raid on DUMC was in keeping with the law.

The Sultan said though a report on the search carried out at the venue was submitted, he was satisfied the action by Jais was correct and did not breach laws enforceable in Selangor.

The Sultan also stated: "Based on investigations by

Jais, there were evidence of attempts to subvert the faith and belief of Muslims but the evidence obtained would be insufficient for further legal action to be taken and after carefully deliberating the report by Jais and after obtaining advice from religious authorities and legal experts, we are in agreement there would be no prosecution against any parties.

"Even so, we command Jais provide counselling to Muslims involved in the said dinner, to restore their belief

and faith in the Religion of Islam.

"We also command Jais to preach to Muslims in a more regular and organised manner so their belief and faith towards Islam is protected and enhanced."