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Panel says no to ban and all forms of harassment

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) said it is against all forms of harassment, intimidation, threats and attacks on any Malaysian, including those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) community.

Their right to personal liberty, dignity and privacy must be respected, MCCBCHST, the umbrella body for major non-Muslim religions in Malaysia, said in a statement yesterday.

The statement, signed by its president Daozhang Tan Hoe Chieow, his deputy Sardar Jagir Singh, the three vice-presidents — Sing Kan, Reverend Dr Thomas Philips, R.S Mohan Shan and the secretary-general Prematilaka K.D Serisena — was issued in response to the ban on the “Seksualiti Merdeka” festival.

“We also note that all Malaysians have a right to freedom of expression and can disagree with our existing laws.

“As long as they assemble in peace to discuss these matters, to educate and create awareness, and to seek law reform, their right to express themselves and to assemble peacefully must also be respected,” it added.

The MCCBCHST said it, therefore, condemned the hateful speech directed at members of that community, and the blanket ban on the Seksualiti Merdeka festival assembling peacefully in a private place.

The council said it recognised that the norms for sexual practices within each religion, as in

numerous other matters, were governed by the commandments, laws, rules and regulations and values as set and practised within each religious group.

“Often, there are differences on a given subject between one religion and another in our coalition.”

The MCCBCHST said it recognised these differences, respected their

practice by members of that faith, opposed any attempt to impose the norms and/or values of one upon another and had, did, and would continue to support such norms or values of any religion as long as they meet universally recognised norms of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to life, the right to personal liberty, the right to the dignity of the person and the right to privacy, and respects the equal rights of all others.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia’s communications officer Ahmad Hafiz Osman said the UNDP was not involved in the Seksualiti Merdeka festival.

He said the UN Theme Group on HIV, which was linked to the United Nations Country Team for Malaysia, was the one dealing with the Seksualiti Merdeka festival, but he could not provide further information on the latter’s involvement.

It was reported yesterday that the UN was part of the coalition of or-

ganisers of Seksualiti Merdeka which also included non-governmental organisations like the Malaysian Bar Council, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram), Empower, PY Foundation and Amnesty International.

NGO Sisters in Islam (SIS) said it strongly disagreed with the police’s blanket ban on Seksualiti Merdeka.

SIS said it saw this as another pattern of censorship and banning of freedom of expression, association and the free circulation of ideas in Malaysia.

“We are concerned at how the ban is going to be enforced by the police force. Was there, for example, a court order to ban the festival? How exactly do the police intend to follow through this ‘ban’?”

“While we understand that there are Muslims opposed to ideas of respecting gender and sexual diversity, as a Muslim women’s organisation, SIS disagrees with the methods used to stifle these ideas,” said SIS in a statement.

SIS urged fellow Muslims to exercise compassion and wisdom in dealing with the issues brought up by Seksualiti Merdeka.

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— Sisters in Islam