

CSOs Stand in Solidarity with Women Human Rights Defender Tengku Emma Zuriana and Condemn Online Gender-Based Attacks

28 April 2020

We, the undersigned civil society organisations (CSO), international groups, community leaders, politicians and human rights activists, are gravely appalled by, and strongly condemn, the mounting racist and xenophobic attacks in Malaysia against the Rohingya people.

We also strongly condemn the targeted attacks against Tengku Emma Zuriana Tengku Azmi, the European Rohingya Council's ambassador to Malaysia, and other concerned individuals for expressing their opinion and support for the rights of the Rohingya people seeking refuge in Malaysia. **We stand in solidarity with them!**

Vicious online attacks

On 21 April 2020, Tengku Emma had her letter [regarding her concern over the pushback of the Rohingya boat to sea](#) published in the media. Since then she has received mobbed attacks and intimidation online, especially on Facebook.

The attacks, targeted her gender, particularly, with some including calls for rape. They were also intensely racist, both specifically targeted at her as well as the Rohingya. The following forms of violence have been documented thus far:

- Doxing - a gross violation by targeted research into her personal information and publishing it online, including her NRIC, phone number, car number plate, personal photographs, etc.;
- Malicious distribution of a photograph of her son, a minor, and other personal information, often accompanied by aggressive, racist or sexist comments;
- Threat of rape and other physical harm, and;
- Distribution of fake and sexually explicit images.

The attacks are rapid, extensive and appear to be aimed at mobilising support online to silence her for her views. One Facebook post that attacked her was shared more than [18,000 times](#) since 23 April 2020.

Online gender-based violence reflects and amplifies injustice, deep-rooted gender-based discrimination and structural misogyny entrenched in our patriarchal society.

The scale and character of these attacks, on the other hand, can have the compounded impact of creating an overwhelming sense of fear, besides causing real damage to the targeted individual's health, reputation and safety. Such impacts are precisely why these attacks appear to be coordinated - if not formally, then informally - with the objective of terrorising and silencing critical voices and opinions that are often in defense of justice and the human rights of people

facing multiple discrimination. Malaysia is also one of the countries that are known to [employ \(paid\) cyber troopers to launch coordinated online attacks and political propaganda](#).

We are deeply concerned and raise the question if there is indeed a concerted effort to spread inhumane, xenophobic and widespread hate that seem to be proliferating in social media spaces on the issue of Rohingya seeking refuge in Malaysia, as a tool to divert attention from the current COVID-19 crisis response and mitigation.

Access to justice?

When the attacks were reported to Facebook by Tengku Emma, no action was taken. Facebook responded by stating that the attacks did not amount to a breach of their Community Standards. With her information being circulated, accompanied by calls of aggression and violence, Tengku Emma was forced to deactivate her Facebook account. She subsequently lodged a police report in fear for her own safety and that of her family.

There is, to date, no clear protection measures from either the police or Facebook regarding her reports.

It is clear that despite direct threats to her safety and the cumulative nature of the attacks, current reporting mechanisms on Facebook are inadequate to respond, whether in timely or decisive ways, to limit harm. It is also unclear to what extent the police or the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) are willing and able to respond to attacks such as this.

It has been seven (7) days since Tengku Emma received her first attack, which has since ballooned outwards to tens of thousands. The only recourse she seems to have is deactivating her Facebook account, while the proponents of hatred and xenophobia continue to act unchallenged. This points to the systemic gaps in policy and laws in addressing xenophobia, online gender-based violence and hate speech, and even where legislation exists, implementation is far from sufficient.

Our demands:

It must be stressed that the recent emergence and reiteration of xenophobic rhetoric and pushback against the Rohingya, including those already in Malaysia as well as those adrift at sea seeking asylum from Malaysia, is inhumane and against international norms and standards. The current COVID-19 pandemic is not an excuse for Malaysia to abrogate its duty as part of the international community.

1. The Malaysian government must, with immediate effect, engage with the United Nations, specifically the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR), and civil society organisations to **find a durable solution in support of the Rohingya seeking asylum in Malaysia** on humanitarian grounds.

2. We also call on Malaysia to **implement the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred** that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, through a multistakeholder framework that promotes freedom of expression based on the principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and diversity.
3. Social media platforms, meanwhile, have the obligation to **review and improve their existing standards and guidelines** based on the lived realities of women and marginalised communities, who are often the target of online hate speech and violence, including understanding the cumulative impact of mobbed attacks and how attacks manifest in local contexts.
4. We must **end all xenophobic and racist attacks and discrimination against Rohingya** who seek asylum in Malaysia; and stop online harassment, bullying and intimidation against human rights defenders working on the Rohingya crisis.

Endorsed by the following Malaysian CSOs, NGOs, leaders, politicians and activists:

- 1) Agora Society
- 2) Al-Hasan Volunteer Network
- 3) ALIRAN
- 4) All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
- 5) Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)
- 6) Asylum Access Malaysia
- 7) Badan Bertindak Majlis Anti Pmerdagangan Manusia Selangor (MAPMAS)
- 8) Beyond Borders Malaysia
- 9) Carefugees
- 10) Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC)
- 11) Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
- 12) ENGAGE
- 13) EMPOWER Malaysia
- 14) Foreign Spouses Support Group
- 15) G25 Malaysia
- 16) GERAK (Pergerakan Tenaga Akademik Malaysia)
- 17) International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
- 18) Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF)
- 19) Justice for Sisters
- 20) KRYSS Network
- 21) Liga Rakyat Demokratik
- 22) Malaysian Action for Justice & Unity (MAJU)
- 23) North-South Initiative
- 24) NGOHub
- 25) Our Journey
- 26) Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM)
- 27) PLUHO, People Like Us, Hang Out!

- 28) People Like Us Support Ourselves (PLUsos)
- 29) Persatuan Al-Hunafa
- 30) Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor
- 31) Pertubuhan Pembangunan Kebajikan dan Persekitaran Positif Malaysia (SEED)
- 32) Projek Wawasan Rakyat (POWR)
- 33) Pusat KOMAS
- 34) Relief, Education and Development Organisation (READ)
- 35) Sisters in Islam
- 36) Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram)
- 37) Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN Malaysia)
- 38) Tenaganita
- 39) The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0)
- 40) The Instant Cafe Theatre Company
- 41) The Society for the Promotion of Human Rights (PROHAM)
- 42) Yayasan Chow Kit
- 43) WITNESS
- 44) Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
- 45) Women's Centre for Change (WCC) Penang
- 46) Yang Berhormat Kasthuriraani Patto
- 47) Yang Berhormat Maria Chin Abdullah
- 48) Yang Berhormat Teresa Kok Suh Sim
- 49) Yang Berhormat Wong Chen
- 50) Dato' Ambiga Sreenevasan
- 51) Dr Mohd Faizal Musa
- 52) Andrew Khoo
- 53) Fadiyah Nadwa Fitri
- 54) Katrina Jorene Maliamauv
- 55) Siti Kasim
- 56) Suriani Kempe
- 57) Vizla Kumaresan

Endorsed by the following international CSOs and activists:

- 1) Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) [Thailand]
- 2) Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organization [Canada]
- 3) Fondazione Pangea onlus [Italy]
- 4) Maruah Singapore [Singapore]
- 5) Kamayani Bali Mahabal [India]
- 6) Saadia Haq [Pakistan]

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