



BUILDING A STRONGER MALAYSIA FOR THE FUTURE

Malaysia is at a critical juncture. The nation can choose to look forward and prepare a strong foundation for the future, or it can remain mired in the culture of divisive ethnic-based politics and authoritarian rule that has resulted in decades of mismanagement and corruption, stifled the nation's progress and led to the overall deterioration of the country.

All Malaysians need to be united and work together to rebuild the nation. We need to lay down a strong institutional framework that will help minimize the risk of future corruption and abuse of power, and create economic and social progress for the benefit for all.

Global Bersih calls upon Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir and all political leaders to restore the confidence of the Malaysian electorate by giving clear direction in key policy areas, and by moving forward on the reform agenda necessary to build a strong foundation for Malaysia's future, as follows:

1. **CLEAR POLITICAL DIRECTION AND TRANSITION** - An immediate priority is for the government to communicate clear policy directions and a transparent plan for a smooth political transition from Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir to Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim. This is essential to provide the clarity and direction necessary to move forward on reforms, as well as to build the confidence and political stability necessary to attract local and foreign investment and strengthen the economy.
2. **ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY** - A united nation in which all communities work together is essential to bring social and economic progress. The cultural and ethnic diversity of Malaysia should not be feared, but seen as an asset which enriches Malaysian society, and which can help the nation compete on the global stage. The divisive racial and religious rhetoric being increasingly used for short-term political ends is detrimental to all communities and very dangerous for the nation as a whole. The government must take an immediate clear stand against communal and religious-based politics and sanction individuals or institutions which provoke ethnic and religious division. It should, at the same time, institute policies and legal and institutional reforms aimed at promoting harmony among all ethnic groups and religions. Open and robust but respectful dialogue, that is inclusive of all communities, is needed to resolve conflicts peacefully.
3. **DECENTRALIZATION OF POWER** - Excessive concentration of power has led to blatant corruption, abuse of power, cronyism and a sense of impunity for those in power, a situation aggravated by the shortage of checks and balances. Over-centraliza-

tion of power also leads to a disconnection between those holding power and the everyday concerns of ordinary Malaysians. It is therefore essential to decentralize political power by distributing this more evenly among different posts, functions and institutions. Individuals and institutions should not be allowed to accumulate different roles or powers which would lead to excessive concentration of power and raise potential conflicts of interest. Many studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between the level of corruption and the economic advancement of a country. Malaysia can only progress to become an advanced country by decentralizing power so as to curb the abuse of excessive power that has led to rampant corruption and abuse in the past.

4. ENSURE EFFECTIVE CHECKS AND BALANCES BY STRENGTHENING INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS - The weakening over the years of key institutions and processes, which would normally provide checks and balance to political power, has greatly contributed to the over-concentration and abuse of power in Malaysia. Institutions such as the judiciary, Parliament, the press, civil society, and the bodies overseeing anti-corruption activities, the electoral process and other key functions, must be given independence from the executive and protected from political interference, censorship and repression. This will necessitate both institutional reforms as well as the repeal or amendment of existing laws which are repressive and/or weaken the independence of such institutions. We urge the government to take immediate action to strengthen institutions that can monitor and provide checks and balances to the executive's power which are crucial to curb abuse and corruption.

5. REFORM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM TO PREPARE NEW GENERATIONS OF MALAYSIANS FOR THE FUTURE - The education system must be reformed to provide young Malaysians with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and independent thinking necessary to participate actively in the democratic process, and to succeed in today's globally competitive world. Young Malaysians must be taught as early as possible to embrace diversity and competition, and to accept that diversity is needed to help build competition. A merit-based system that encourages healthy competition will help raise the standards, quality and level of skills in all sectors of the population. This is crucial for the progress of the nation and its competitiveness at the global level. The curriculum, extracurricular activities and management of schools and universities should also aim to build among the younger generation a shared Malaysian identity - for example, through educational content reflective of Malaysia's diversity, or by encouraging students from different backgrounds to mix in classes or through sports. The education system should also inculcate common values that include tolerance and openness towards other cultures and communities. Educational opportunities should be inclusive and equal, and be ensured for students from disadvantaged backgrounds



as well as those living in rural communities, regardless of their race, religion, or political preferences.

6. INCLUSIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNANCE FOR THE LONGTERM -

A country is not built by one person or party alone, it is built by the nation as a whole; governance should therefore be inclusive, accountable and transparent. All Malaysian citizens should be enabled in practice to effectively exercise their right to vote, and the voting system should be made as easy as possible to allow all those eligible to vote, including Malaysians living outside the country or away from their constituency. In local and national decision making, the views of communities and groups potentially impacted by policy decisions should be systematically consulted, and their views taken into account. Transparency and accountability are also essential elements of inclusive governance; the government should work for the people, who should have the right to access information and to hold the government accountable. For example, the government should ensure total transparency on all Government Linked Corporations, on their structure, reporting line and performance as well as the publications of their annual statements. Lastly, policy decisions should be made for the long-term benefit and interest of the country, with a view to sustainability, and not governed by short-term narrow political or financial interests.

7. IMPLEMENT NEEDS- AND MERIT- BASED POLICIES -

Poverty and special needs exist in all communities. To tackle poverty and other socio-economic problems effectively, the government should ensure that policies are targeted towards those who are really in need, regardless of their ethnic origin or religion. Policies based solely on ethnicity or religion will deprive a large part of the population with real needs, while conversely benefiting those who fulfill the ethnic or religious criteria but are not really in need. Policies and incentives based on merit, and not on ethnic or religious criteria, will encourage all communities to strive towards excellence and help to pull up the entire nation. Recognition and reward should be given to all those who work hard and contribute to the economy and country. The current policy approach exacerbates inequalities, and weakens the incentive for beneficiaries to compete on merit while depriving others who are truly in need.

Global Bersih therefore calls upon the leadership of the current government and all political leaders to rise above divisive and partisan politics to concentrate on the reforms that are outlined above to build a sound foundation for the future of Malaysia. For Malaysia to progress and become an advanced and developed country, it must act now to lay down a strong foundation with the right policies, practices, and institutions.



Global Bersih is an international network of Malaysians living overseas and an endorsing organization of Bersih 2.0, a coalition of 56 Malaysian NGOs. Global Bersih works closely with Bersih 2.0 on international advocacy on electoral reform in Malaysia. It aims to support Malaysian civil society's efforts to strengthen Malaysia's maturing democracy, focusing on electoral reform, human rights and strengthening institutions. Global Bersih is a non-profit organization established under the Swiss Civil Code.

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