



Press Statement from Global Bersih

7 May 2020

### **GLOBAL BERSIH URGES MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT TO EXTEND PARLIAMENT SITTING**

The decision made by the Malaysian government to hold a Parliament sitting on 18 May 2020 for only one day, with no debating session, raises serious concerns as to whether Parliament is being allowed to exercise its role and prerogatives.

The Parliament provides checks and balances to the government's power and has a fundamental role in holding the government accountable for its actions to the rakyat, whom Members of Parliament represent. Parliamentary proceedings also help provide transparency on the actions of the government.

Parliamentarians must be allowed to exercise their duty to approve legislation and budgets, as well as to scrutinize the actions of the government, especially in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic and the handling of the RM 250 billion Covid-19 stimulus package. The Parliament should be given the opportunity to debate on urgent and important issues, such as whether the stimulus package is being well spent to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and to reboot the economy. MPs should also be allowed to discuss the best strategies to be undertaken by the government once the MCO is over.

Global Bersih therefore urges the government to extend the Parliamentary sitting to at least 2 weeks to allow proper debate of important issues and decisions which are facing the country during this difficult period.

Global Bersih is aware of the need to exercise social distancing in a Parliament sitting but does not believe that this is a valid reason not to have a parliamentary sitting of normal duration. There are examples of other countries which have continued parliamentary business through virtual parliament sittings. The United Kingdom's House of Commons, for instance, has adopted a hybrid system that allows up to 120 MPs to take part in any parliament proceedings virtually, and another 50 MPs to participate physically while adhering to strict social distancing rules. If the UK House of Commons with 650 MPs can organise themselves to sit while respecting social distancing, Global Bersih believes that the Malaysian Dewan Rakyat with only 222 MPs could do the same with ease, and that any legal or technical issues can be overcome.

Global Bersih believes that the pandemic should not be used as an excuse to deny the Parliament its role of providing checks and balances to the power of the executive, and of helping make the government's actions more transparent. This would be seriously detrimental to the preservation of democracy in Malaysia .

For further information, please contact Global Bersih at:

contact@globalbersih.org  
10 Rue Dr. Alfred Vincent  
1201 Geneva



Switzerland

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