

## **Recommendations for Wisma Putra on mobilising overseas postal voters for upcoming elections.**

**(Updated March 2023)**

### **Background**

We have seen a significant increase in the numbers of overseas voters after the current electoral reforms made by EC, such as:

- The implementation of Automatic Voters Registration (AVR)
- Lowering of voting age to 18 (Undi 18)
- The introduction of online registration for overseas voters on the Election Commission(EC) platform
- Inclusion of Malaysians living in Singapore, South Thailand, Brunei, and Kalimantan in the overseas postal voting system.
- Removal of the requirement for overseas Malaysians to have been in Malaysia for 30 days in the last five years before the registration date.

Thanks to the above reforms and other factors influencing this increase, it is undeniable that the number of overseas Malaysians entitled to vote will increase further. There were 7979 registered overseas postal voters for GE14, and for GE15, the numbers jumped to 48,109 registered overseas voters which indicated a drastic increase of about 603%.

The implementation of Undi18 and Automatic Voters Registration (AVR) alone has caused growth from 14.9 million in GE14 to 21.1 million voters in the previous electoral roll in Malaysia. Many of these "new" voters could qualify as overseas voters.

Even though there are many other factors influencing this increase, it is undeniable that the numbers will rise as, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the population of the Malaysian diaspora already stood at 1,860,037 as at 2020.

In keeping with their role to assist Malaysian citizens overseas, we believe that Malaysian Foreign Missions (MFM) should play a pivotal role in helping to ensure overseas Malaysian voters are sufficiently informed and mobilised to participate in elections to ensure an effective and efficient overseas postal voting process.

### **Recommendations for upcoming elections**

#### **Information dissemination**

We suggest that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wisma Putra) instructs MFMs to actively provide overseas Malaysians with the latest information on overseas postal voting procedures and related matters. This information can be obtained from the Election Commission.

MFMs should ensure that overseas Malaysians can easily access updated and accurate information on overseas postal voter registration and voting processes

from the MFM. All the information should be on the Ministry's website, under a dedicated section of the website to ensure easy access and understanding. Links to the relevant information and voter registration online forms on the Election Commission's website should be displayed. Even though overseas Malaysians still understand and speak the national language, they are not well versed with the rapid growth of the language in the last years due to not having a chance to use the language extensively. Therefore there is a need for all the information to be in Bahasa Melayu (BM) and English to ensure effective messaging.

MFM should actively inform/remind Malaysians in their host countries of important dates and deadlines relating to postal voting. These could be shared on their social media platforms, advertised at the embassies, and/or disseminated through Malaysian associations or clubs in those countries.

In order to ensure accuracy and timely information dissemination, Global Bersih suggests that the information dissemination is centralised on the Wisma Putra portal. The information on overseas voting currently shared on the portal dashboard should be compiled under a specific section on the portal. The section should be labelled clearly and placed visibly on the portal so it can be identified immediately as the information source for overseas postal voters. Example - Voting from Overseas / Mengundi dari Luar Negara. MFMs worldwide should link their pages to this section on the portal. This way, we can ensure that all MFM worldwide can instantly provide accurate, consistent, and updated information.

In order to ensure that the overseas voting section on the portal serves its purpose, the information below must be updated on the portal to be shared by all MFMs in BM and English:

- Automatic registration information to inform overseas Malaysians that they do not have to travel to the embassy to register as first-time voters.
- UNDI 18 reminders to inform overseas Malaysians that anyone aged 18 and above will be automatically registered as voters
- Link to the relevant webpage on the Election Commission (EC) website for checking one's voting status.
- Guide to creating a user account at MySPR: A prominent notice should be displayed that this is a critical first step in order to later register as an overseas postal voter. The registration might take several days for SPR to process, therefore voters should be strongly reminded to do it in advance and not just before the election. This section should include a step-by-step guide on creating the user account.
- How to register as an overseas postal voter: Once the registration for overseas postal voting is opened before an election, this section will have a step-by-step guide on registering as an overseas postal voter.
- FAQ for overseas postal voters: to be updated to reflect current situations such as state elections or general elections. Global Bersih created an extensive FAQ in BM and English for GE15 which was used extensively by overseas Malaysians.
- How to vote from overseas: The voting methods for the last five elections (general and state) have undergone multiple changes. This page should link to current instructions or guides provided by EC and provide English translations if necessary.

Global Bersih also suggests that there should be a contact person at each Malaysian Foreign Mission who specialises in overseas postal voting to guide overseas Malaysians and to ensure that the correct information is being shared.

### Voters Mobilisation

Many members of the Malaysian diaspora are eager to participate in the democratic process but we saw from GE14 and GE15 that they are hindered by lack of updated and accurate information. Hence the need for an active mobilisation effort from all stakeholders. We suggest that Wisma Putra instructs MFMs to diligently reach out to the diaspora and encourage them to register and vote in the elections. MFMs can support social media campaigns encouraging overseas voters to register as overseas postal voters and vote when the time comes. Global Bersih ran a very effective social media campaign for GE 15 to mobilise the diaspora by compiling and disseminating the updated and accurate information. Global Bersih also focused on reducing the spread of fake or incorrect information that confused overseas voters.

MFMs could also encourage more discussion among the diaspora on electoral matters, e.g. organising or taking part in events or webinars, or taking the opportunity at events/functions to disseminate information.

Malaysian clubs are an excellent platform to spread the importance of participating in the voting process. MFMs can encourage and endorse events with Malaysian clubs, such as online talks and webinars.

MFMs must take a non-partisan approach to overseas voters' education and information. Working with non-partisan NGOs such as Global Bersih, which has been doing advocacy work in the diaspora to reach overseas Malaysians, can strengthen the non-partisan approach that is crucial in this mobilisation work. During GE15, Global Bersih carried out a successful mobilisation campaign using the SPR website as a primary source and other sources from our research and networking with local NGOs to create accurate and timely informational materials.

There is also a need to reach out specifically to overseas Malaysian students, as lowering the voting age created considerable growth in young voters. MFMs can work with JPA and MARA to ensure that these students are well-informed and mobilised to vote. Also, it is essential to create a fear-free positive environment for the students to engage in democracy or voting-related activities.

### **Conclusion**

There is an urgency in mobilising and educating the diaspora because of the reforms and the impending state elections.

Global Bersih can be of help to MFMs in the following ways:

- Provide material for use by MFMs on social media platforms and involve MFMs in

an ongoing worldwide voter mobilisation campaign as we are part of the diaspora and can identify the needs of overseas Malaysian communities.

- Assist MFM in disseminating information among the diaspora through events, social media and other communication channels.

The recent GE15 Observation Report by Bersih also reflected that all these recommendations that Global Bersih has been working on for the last few years need to happen to ensure a more effective overseas postal voting system.

The mobilisation of the diaspora and ensuring that Malaysians overseas can vote is consistent with the idea of an inclusive society and respect for all segments of the population, which are the core values of Madani - Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust and Compassion. These core values can be strengthened by engaging more with Malaysians overseas and encouraging them to contribute to Malaysia's development. Involving them more in the democratic process will be a positive step in this direction

Global Bersih remains at your disposal for further communication on this matter.

Global Bersih is an international movement of overseas Malaysians created to support Malaysian civil society's work and strengthen Malaysia's maturing democracy, using peaceful and legal means of action.

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