

Sarawak Ministers Fellowship

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Media Statement On

Restriction of Religious and Civil Rights of Christians In Sarawak

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The Sarawak Ministers Fellowship, consisting of Kuching Ministers Fellowship, Miri Pastors Fellowship, Sibu Pastors Fellowship, Bintulu Pastors Fellowship, and Gempuru Besai Raban Jaku Iban Malaysia (an alliance of Iban churches), fully stands with the Christian Federation of Malaysia on their 10th March official media statement regarding the detentions of the Bahasa Malaysia Bibles in Malaysia.

We view the detention of the latest batch of 30,000 copies of "Perjanjian Baru, Mazmur dan Amsal" (New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs) at the Kuching Port by Kementerian Dalam Negeri on 12th January as another blunt violation and unconstitutional curtailment of the religious liberty of the Christians in our Nation and the State of Sarawak.

The Bible detentions are not the only difficulties which our churches face in resolving key religious liberty issues with government authorities. We have repeatedly encountered restrictions that ran contrary to the guarantee of religious freedom provided in the Federal Constitution.

Article 8 of the Federal Constitution states that "All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law", and "there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law "

Article 11 provides for every person to have "the right to profess and practice his religion", and that every religious group has the right (a) to manage its own religious affairs, (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes, and (c) to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law.

Furthermore, under the 18 Point Agreement for Sarawak in the formation of Malaysia, it is clearly stated that there is no official religion for Sarawak. Therefore the detention of the Bibles at the Kuching Port is not only unconstitutional but it also violates the spirit of the agreement for Sarawak to participate in the formation of Malaysia.

We are deeply disappointed and want to register our strong protest on how these continuous problems have impeded our Christian rights to practise our faith. Therefore,

we call upon our Government to diligently uphold the rights of the Christian community in our State as enshrined in our Federal Constitution.

We acknowledge the biblical teaching to accord respect to the Government and to dialogue and work with those in authority to uphold peace and harmony in our land.