**Comments for upcoming United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston's official Malaysia visit (12 to 22 August 2019)**

From: KUASA (democracy outreach), base in Kuala Lumpur [This can be reproduced in its entirety]

The last one year has been dramatic for Malaysia and its politics, but it has not been the most transformative for the impoverished. The previous government’s cash handouts and government benefits primarily for Malay Malaysians have raised expectations for the continuation of these benefits. Purported contraction of benefits has become fodder for the new opposition to posit the present government is less pro-poor.

The key to the situation, or the glaring gap, is low political education.

Political education remains low due to low input in public schooling and the absence of media to moderate the conversation. Religiosity has been presented as a means to process poverty and justification for it.

This gap has not been addressed. The government focuses instead on distribution of subsistence and generating a sense of gratitude among the poor.

Political parties do not assist in that they see membership roll as a tool to represent support but not as a means to get more participation from the said members. Even the party subscriptions for the poor are paid by politicians from their localities.

Nothing advances this argument than the widespread practice of open feasts for the public as a manifestation of politicians running for office caring for the people.

KUASA (Power, in the Malay language) has been a proponent for democracy education since 2013. We’ve monitored government and leadership performances and disseminated information via social media and roadshow. We have yet to execute democracy education programmes, firstly, before government change in 2018 this was strictly controlled by security agencies, and second, KUASA has limited funds.

While Malaysia is a wealthy nation in comparison to many developing nations, it is mired in poor income and wealth distribution. This despite possessing a manageable population size and a history of comparative economic success. An elitist government produces indifference, and perhaps sinisterly opportunism to use poverty to gain political mileage. The previous government relied heavily on political seats where poverty is rampant to secure wins.

There is a window now to promote greater awareness on political and democratic rights, along with other necessary programmes to improve economic viability and opportunities. Cognisance of freedoms and self-determination feeds the poor the ability to emphasise their rights regardless of their economic status. To look at rights as linked but not determined by their ability to gain economically first.

In plainer terms, to ensure they show consumerism when interacting with government, the civil service, legislative and judiciary. That their currency, the vote, deserves better.

Indeed, the awareness of rights can ensure they participate in the political process as participants rather than distant observers, when decisions pertaining to policies to alleviate their poverty are made. Good policies are not gifts from the enabled for the less privileged, but rather the product of all Malaysians of all stations participating, which ensures all interests are factored especially since they are from self-interest.

Economic improvements must occur hand in hand with democratic appreciation. Freedoms breed stronger communities.

We would implore the UN to advocate for greater political awareness education through the addition of universal political education in schools, coupled with civic education and the Malaysian government and legislative system; and concurrently to encourage the same exposures for poor communities and their leaders, with the goal of introducing processes and resources which strengthen the concepts of democracy in the hearts of the most disenfranchised so that they escape the darkness of political ignorance.

*Visit the following please:*

Former rubber plantation enclaves across the west coast of West Malaysia. Teluk Intan in Perak is an excellent choice.

The Orang Asli (Aboriginal Peoples) reservations which are directly under the care of aboriginal peoples department. The areas in Kelantan would be of great interest, for example Gua Musang.

The interiors of Sabah and Sarawak, in East Malaysia. By land, takes up days but quicker with private chartered helicopters.

*Individuals and organisations to meet:*

KUASA: Democracy outreach

SUHAKAM: The Human Rights Commission

We would welcome an invitation to discuss in depth when the special rapporteur, Mr Alston, is in Kuala Lumpur.

Praba Ganesan

Chief Executive

KUASA