

**CHRISTIAN FEDERATION OF MALAYSIA
PERSEKUTUAN KRISTIAN MALAYSIA**

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CFM MEDIA STATEMENT

**CFM AGAINST SHRINKING PUBLIC SPACE FOR RELIGIOUS
EXPRESSION AND INCREASING RELIGIOUS REPRESSION**

The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has observed with deep concern the ever-shrinking public space for religious expression in Malaysia. The CFM also notes the worrying trend of curbing freedom of religious expressions without prior consultation with stakeholders. The overall environment of religious acceptance and understanding deteriorates as the country is dragged from one incident of intolerance to another.

The recent controversy surrounding the demand by a group of Muslims for the removal of the sign of the cross from a church in Taman Medan in Selangor is but the latest expression of that intolerance. Even the central symbol of our faith, the cross, which is the symbol of love and sacrifice of God for humankind is now seen or projected by some as a threat. It joins the list of other expressions of intolerance, including a continuing push for prohibition against religious words and expressions in Bahasa Malaysia which have been commonly used in Christian worship even before our nation was born. There is the fear that common parlance results in influence, propagation and conversion. This fear has caused tension and has led to numerous incidents in recent years where copies of the Al-Kitab, our sacred book, were detained or out-rightly seized, only to be returned after they were mutilated by endorsements of prohibitive words.

Worse, it is now proposed that the importation of the Al-Kitab be subject to newly-announced administrative requirements and procedures in Sabah and Sarawak albeit in draft form for discussion. The latest edition of these administrative requirements contain outright prohibitions of importation of the Al-Kitab into Peninsular Malaysia, save for personal use, in total violation of the Federal Constitution's protection for freedom of religion.

Instead of building religiously self-confident communities of mutual respect in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation, there has been a progressive layering of fear, tension and suspicion.

Our nation is in dire need of encouraging respectful discourse and dialogue to promote mutual understanding and widen perspectives.

The CFM is against this shrinking public space for religious expression and increasing religious repression. The CFM calls for the following to be immediately implemented:

A. All relevant authorities, departments and agencies of the government must exercise their duties and conduct their activities properly and promptly without prejudice or preference within the unambiguous ambit of the Federal Constitution to ensure that the freedom of religion for minority communities is equally respected and that incidents such as the removal of the cross and confiscation and/or mutilation of the Al-Kitab and other religious materials are not repeated.

B. Members of the civil service, especially those in the front line of engagement with members of the public, must be given adequate education on the necessary decorum and sensitivity in dealing with inter-religious matters and to accord the necessary respect to all religions without bias or favour, regardless of their own religious convictions.

C. The Federal Cabinet must uphold the 10-point solution concerning the Al-Kitab and desist from imposing any further restrictions on the use, publication and import of the Al-Kitab throughout Malaysia. The Government should ensure the adherence and implementation of the directive issued by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 8 April 2011 regarding the importation of Bibles in Bahasa Malaysia / Indonesia. The Federal Cabinet must stop pretending that the 10-point solution applies only to Sabah and Sarawak, or that they are powerless where state laws are concerned, since the Barisan Nasional hold the reigns of political power in 10 of our 13 states, and control all the Federal Territories. In particular, the latest proposed standard operating procedure (S.O.P.) announced recently to church leaders in Kuching and in Kota Kinabalu should be withdrawn as it violates the provisions of the Federal Constitution. The importation of the Al-Kitab is part and parcel of the freedom of religion and does not come under the scope of the states to regulate the religion of Islam. The specific requirement for non-Muslim religions to seek the approval of the Federal Government's Islamic agencies for the importation of religious material is in clear violation of the provisions of the Federal Constitution and the spirit of the 10-point solution.

For these reasons, CFM rejects the S.O.P. regarding the publication and distribution of the Al-Kitab. The S.O.P. negates the very guarantee of freedom of religion and the right to manage one's own religious affairs.

D. All relevant Federal and state lawmakers must take into account and give express regard to the sentiments and concerns of non-Muslims in the matter of the proposed implementation of Hudud laws. Though there have been statements that such laws would only affect persons professing the religion of Islam, the CFM and other members of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism have expressed concern that this would make our dual legal system untenable and lead to irreconcilable conflicts of laws, especially in cases where both Muslim and non-Muslim parties are involved. A dual criminal legal system, and in particular one which extends to Hudud laws, would not only result in legal confusion and constitutional quagmire but inevitably to miscarriages of justice for one or both parties.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eu Hong Seng', with a small dot at the end of the signature.

Rev. Dr. Eu Hong Seng,
Chairman and the Executive Committee,
The Christian Federation of Malaysia