

Perpaduan Anak Negeri (PAN) Sabah - Native Solidarity of Sabah

P O Box 423, 89507 Penampang, Kota Kinabalu
Sabah, Malaysia.

EMBARGO: For use only after 1.00 p.m. 09 August 2014 Saturday.

PAPAR “MAMANGKIS” STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP JOHN WONG

It is by God’s grace that we are gathered here today, to continue raising our “Mamangkis” as Anak Negeri of this land. We thank God for the unity of the churches in voicing out our common concerns. Indeed we are at the crossroad of many internal and external challenges to us as a multiracial and multi-religious society, and as a Christian community.

Threats from external forces invading our borders and threats from the huge presence of illegal immigrants have constantly reminded us of our vulnerability. However, many a time, our fears and cries are not seriously taken heed of by those in authorities.

Internally, our nation is confronted with unprecedented threat to our Christian faith. Attack on our religious beliefs and practices, even the language we use in our Bible, literatures and worship are under siege.

On 23 June 2014, the Federal Court rejected the Catholic Church’s application for leave to appeal against the Court of Appeal judgement which banned the word “Allah” in the weekly *Herald*. It is indeed sad that even the Judiciary, to whom all the meek and downtrodden look towards for justice and protection, declined by a majority decision, to do justice.

While we respect the decision of the Federal Court as it stands and for what it is worth, we are deeply saddened that the Federal Court failed to recognize that there is serious infringement of the Constitution, and more particularly the blatant attack on the lawful entitlement of the citizens to practice their religion without let or hindrance. It saddens us to see our elected national leaders and the Judiciary have deliberately failed to uphold the Constitution and above all defend it.

It is internationally recognized that the word “Allah” is an Arabic term for God. Indeed it has been used even in the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. In Sabah, the term has been used by our forefathers long before the formation of Malaysia.

Despite Putrajaya’s assurance that the restriction on the non-Muslims to use the word “Allah” only applies to *Herald*, there have been attempts by certain groups to apply a blanket ban. The seizing of Bibles by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) from the premises of the Bible Society of Malaysia is a typical example. Such action blatantly disregards the Putrajaya’s assurance. Till now the seized Bibles have yet to be returned.

Cases like these do not augur well for the concept of “1 Malaysia” which the Federal Government so ardently promoting. Neither does it promote goodwill, peace and harmony which all Malaysians, irrespective of race, religion or culture long for.

In Sabah we have always lived in peace and harmony, irrespective of our religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds as our forefathers have done. This attack now on our rights to practice our faith is a direct attack on the nation’s integrity and above all the Constitution.

We all know that Malaysia was formed between four equal and independent States, namely Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah. It was a conscious and deliberate move, with proper safeguards for us in Sabah and Sarawak, and more particularly the freedom of religion. Though Singapore left, Sarawak and Sabah stayed on in this Federation, with the sole desire to be allowed to live in peace and freedom to exercise our right to worship our God in the way we know how and the language of our own. The *Batu Sumpah* memorial stone in Keningau is testimony to that desire.

In this respect we implore upon Putrajaya to do all and everything to return our religious freedom and the peace and harmony which we enjoyed and have been enjoying. We implore Putrajaya to honour and respect the Malaysia Agreement and the Federal Constitution, and let us live in amity.

Aside from threats to religious freedom, we are aware that many Anak Negeri Christians have Muslim sounding names and some even with “bin” or “binti” in their names, and this has led to a lot of confusion among officers and staff of the National Registration Department (JPN). Some of these Anak Negeri Christians are wrongly categorised as Muslim in their identity cards. These mistakes may be due to ignorance of the JPN officers but the authorities must address these issues and take every effort to rectify them. It is the legitimate right of every citizen and more so the Anak Negeri of Sabah to have his or her identity card correctly issued by the JPN. Nobody can take that right away from him or her.

We are also aware that subtle conversions of under-age children are taking place in our schools. Just over a year ago the Catholic Church in Sabah together with the Sabah Council of Churches had made an official complaint to the Education Ministry of a conversion ploy at Labuan Matriculation College. We regret that these young students are constantly subjected to various forms of harassment, ridicule and pressure to change their religion. Should incidences like these prevail, we question whether the institutes of higher learning in our country are conducive for studies? We urge that religious freedom as enshrined in the Constitution shall be upheld at all cost.

Let us pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this land of ours, especially upon our national leaders in making the right and courageous move of championing the rights of each and every community, irrespective of race, belief or social status. Let us pray that we will once again enjoy the harmony, peace and freedom among the peoples in this land.

The Lord has commanded in Deuteronomy 19:14, *“You shall not remove your neighbour’s landmark, which the men of old time have set, in your inheritance which you shall inherit in*

the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess it.” May the glory of God in our land to be restored!

“O Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.” (Psalm 30:2) This is our prayer and hope for our land. Let us give all glory and praise to Him, now and forevermore. Amen!

ENDS.

This statement is issued by Perpaduan Anak Negeri (PAN) Sabah - Native Solidarity of Sabah in conjunction with the Mamangkis ceremony in Papar, Sabah on 9 August 2014 officiated by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sabah John Wong. For more information, please contact Pastor Esther Golingi HP 013 866 6575.