



11 January 2010

### MALAYSIA CONDEMNS THE RECENT CHURCH INCIDENTS

I want to lend my voice to our Prime Minister and the many others in Malaysia who have strongly condemned violence against Christian churches during the past week. These disgraceful acts have no place anywhere, let alone in Malaysia's modern, multi-ethnic, multicultural society.

Like all democratic nations founded on the rule of law, Malaysia has an independent judiciary. Independent courts inevitably render some decisions that are unpopular, sometimes even to a majority within a society. The court's recent ruling regarding the word to be used in the Malaysian language in Christian bibles deeply upset some Malaysians with strongly held views on that issue. The vast majority of Malaysians—from every ethnic and religious background—reacted peacefully. They have discussed this religious issue within the long-held framework of Malaysia's free press, free speech and open society. A small number of persons felt differently, choosing to carry out vicious acts of violence against more than half a dozen churches, violating our national sense of community as well as basic human decency.

Although Malaysian police reported the assaults did not cause any injuries and were not coordinated, the Malaysian government, directed by Prime Minister Najib, took quick action to respond.

First, we increased police security around churches.

Second, we launched investigations into the attacks, to bring those responsible to justice.

Third, the Prime Minister immediately visited damaged churches to speak directly with pastors and congregations.

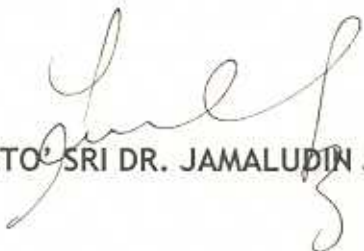
Fourth, the Prime Minister provided funds on an urgent basis to help the churches repair damaged buildings.

Fifth, the Prime Minister and a wide-range of government officials spoke out on the need for tolerance and peaceful discourse. As Prime Minister Najib stated after the church attacks, "It's been a difficult weekend for all. I share your outrage. We must stand united and not allow these incidents to break us."

The good and decent people who make up the vast majority of our nation have responded as our Prime Minister has hoped. A 15-group coalition of Muslims who had rallied just last week against the court decision offered this week to protect Christians and their churches against further violence, issuing a statement to put on record their opposition to the arson attacks and their intention to foster better communal relations. At the same time, I have been deeply touched by the calls of forgiveness by some of the churches that were attacked. Forgiveness is precisely the kind of peaceful and tolerant attitude that exemplifies the society we are and the society we wish to continue to build. Instead of the ugly attacks breaking us apart, they have helped to bring us together.

As one of his first acts after coming into office in 2009, Prime Minister Najib launched the "1Malaysia" concept. 1Malaysia is a nationwide campaign to underscore and enhance ethnic and religious discourse and tolerance in our diverse society.

Acts of violence by a few will not prevent us from moving forward with efforts to bring our nation together. Instead, they will prompt us to work all the harder to live together with renewed appreciation of our respect for one another, our differences and our unity.



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