



November 6, 2015

UN Body Urges Release of Malaysia's Jailed Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim

Report calls for Anwar Ibrahim to be freed.

By Luke Hunt

Two years ago scandal-plagued Najib Razak had a hollow victory at the polls. He secured a second term as Malaysian Prime Minister through gerrymandering but the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was the popular winner with more 50 percent over the overall vote.

In February, Anwar was jailed after a tortuously long legal process over sex and sexual preferences in a court case the Malaysian opposition, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), and independent observers said was politically motivated.

Now a report released by Anwar's family from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention agrees. It says the sodomy charges, illegal but rarely prosecuted in Malaysia, were politically motivated and Anwar should be freed immediately.

Anwar is a political prisoner. That will hurt Najib, who is already reeling over corruption allegations involving the national fund 1 Malaysia Berhad (1MBD), just the latest in a list of scandals including the acquisition of two French-made submarines and the subsequent murder of Shaariibuugiin Altantuyaa.

Relations between the Malay majority and the Chinese minority have rarely been worse, while the rise of hardline Malay-Muslims – with moves such as one to ban Christians from using the word Allah – has upset any semblance of religious harmony.

Anwar's prosecution was dogged by controversy. In 2012, he was acquitted by the High Court. Outside the court three homemade bombs were detonated – hidden inside a rubbish bin and two police cones.

He was jailed on appeal. Now, the UN working group is also expressing fears for his health.

“Taking into account all the circumstances of the case, the Working Group considers that the adequate remedy would be to release Mr. Ibrahim immediately and ensure that his political rights that were removed based on his arbitrary detention be reinstated,” the report said.

Appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, the working Group has five members – from Australia, Benin, Mexico, South Korea and Ukraine -and is charged with investigating allegations of arbitrary detention.

Anwar’s daughter Nurul Izzah Anwar told the BBC that the ruling had vindicated her father and urged the government to honor the recommendations.

“The findings by the UN working group on arbitrary detention basically solidifies our position that he’s innocent, the victim of politically motivated persecution” she said.

The UN also said the Malaysian government had not replied to queries about the case which included his physical and psychological health. There were claims that he was in pain while in solitary confinement.

Domestic voices have also called for his release, including Nik Abduh – the youth chief of the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) who said Anwar was a victim of politics. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) also called for the opposition leader’s immediate release.

“We fully support the UN’s call for the Government of Malaysia to release Anwar and reinstate all of his political rights that were denied following his conviction,” said Suaram Executive Director Sevan Doraisamy.

PKR Secretary-General Rafizi Ramli said the UN report highlighted the world response which was becoming increasingly more aware that Anwar was jailed because of the struggle for the country’s top job.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult for Najib to separate the Anwar issue as a personal issue,” he said. “In order for Malaysia to pull itself out of the crisis it is facing, the best solution is to have a strong alternative leader.”

The enormous issues besetting Malaysia have been brewing for years and extensively documented in the international media and mainly through online publications in-country. The Najib fails to release Anwar—the more the pressure will grow amid his troubled premiership.