



SABAH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MAJLIS GEREJA-GEREJA SABAH.

沙巴教会协会

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Press Statement of the Sabah Council of Churches

Greetings in the name of our precious Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus.

As we cross over from the Jubilee Year of Malaysia into the next 50 years, we reaffirm the foundational basis of the formation of this beloved nation of ours. We will strive together with all Malaysians and our government, both at the federal and state level in working on the God-given task of nation building.

Fifty years ago, on Malaysia Day, a great Malaysian nation was formed out of the partnership of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. One of the foundational bases of this coming together of state entities concerned agreement on the role of religion and religious freedom. It is to the great tragedy of Malaysia that this foundational pillar of nation building is being progressively undermined and eroded. Indeed we must say with grave concern that the next 50 years of Malaysia must start with nation re-building where this fundamental building block of the nation will be duly repositioned at the heart of the Malaysian nation.

We would reiterate and that Sabah and Sarawak consented to form Malaysian 1963 with Islam as the religion of the federation on the express condition that there will be complete freedom of religion without any hindrance placed on other religions. This is found in all the constitutional documents which record the concerns, discussions, assurances and agreements which finally led to the solemn execution of the Malaysia Agreement. Thus the Government Paper "Malaysia and Sarawak published by Authority of Government of Sarawak dated 4 Jan 1962 (and this is reflected in the corresponding Government of North Borneo Paper) states unequivocally as follows:

"People have wondered whether the fact that Islam is the official religion of the Federation of Malaya would affect religious freedom in Sarawak as part of Malaysia. This has been clarified at the recent Consultative Committee Meeting. Although Malaysia would have Islam as the official religion of the enlarged Federation there would be no hindrance placed on the practice of other religions. Complete freedom of religion would be guaranteed in the Federal Constitution. Sarawak has at the present has no established religion and it would not be required to accept Islam as its State religions

We acknowledge and will continue to uphold Article 3 of the Federal Constitution which provides that Islam is the religion of the Federation. It is carefully recorded in the constitutional documents that this provision which makes Islam the religion of the Federation for official and ceremonial purposes will not fetter the religious freedom of adherents of other faiths. Hence Article 3 anxiously states in the same breath that all people are free to practice their religions in peace and harmony in any part of the country.

We therefore find it completely unacceptable that what are common practices of the Church in Sabah and Sarawak for hundreds of years and indeed for generations of Christians even before the very idea of Malaysia was conceived is now proscribed by administrative orders and laws. What we consider to be a most serious breach of the foundational pillar pertaining

to religion and religious freedom is the unrelenting assault on the right of Bumiputera Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians to use the Alkitab and the word "Allah" to refer to the Creator God. In this regard, we are compelled to reiterate and reassert:

(a) that the word "Allah" is an integral part of and inherent in the practice of the Christian faith by Bahasa Malaysia-speaking churches in Sabah and Sarawak and Christians in and from these 2 states;

(b) that the Churches expect that the guarantee of religious freedom enshrined in the Federal Constitution when Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form the Malaysian nation will be fully respected and honoured; and

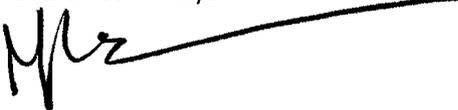
(c) that the 10-point agreement by the Federal Cabinet on the printing, importation and distribution of the Alkitab in which the word "Allah" is an integral part of the Bahasa Malaysia Holy Scriptures and also in the practice of the Christian faith in Bahasa Malaysia-speaking churches based on the Alkitab will be fully honoured.

Two thirds of the Church in Malaysia consists of 1.6 million Bumiputera Christians of Sabah and Sarawak who use Bahasa Malaysia language of worship in addition to their native languages. With the greatest respect to the governing authorities, whether they are the legislative, executive or judicial arms of government, we ask that religious bigotry, racism and extremism should not be perpetuated and allowed to fester and poison our Malaysian nation. Specifically with regard to the use of the word "Allah", proscribing the use of the word "Allah" would instantly turn these native *Bumiputera* into law-breakers in the very land of which they are the sons of the soil. This is not only abhorrent but wholly unacceptable. The Bumiputera church will continue to use the Bahasa Malaysia Alkitab together with the word "Allah" both of which are fundamental to all aspects of the profession and practice of the Christian faith.

This year we celebrate the fiftieth year of the formation of Malaysia. At the threshold of the next 50 years of Malaysia, we shall continue to strive and thrive as a rainbow nation of many tongues, ethnicities and creeds. We will do so together as a nation working together on the common platform constructed on the 5 principles of the Rukun Negara. In our commitment to "Belief in God", let there be mutual acceptance and honour of each other's religious practices, beliefs, precepts and doctrines. In our commitment to the twin principles of the "Rule of Law" and "Supremacy of the Constitution", let all Malaysians and our respective governing institutions understand, adhere to and apply with integrity the true meaning and intent of the foundational and fundamental provisions of the Constitution which is the supreme law of the Federation.

Let us together seek to build this beloved nation for the good of all peoples so that all can enjoy the fruits of prosperity and goodness in this land the Almighty God has blessed us with.

May Almighty God bless you and keep you, may His face shine upon you and give you peace.
God bless Malaysia!



Bishop Datuk Dr. Thomas Tsen
President of the Sabah Council of Churches