



# SABAH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MAJLIS GEREJA-GEREJA SABAH.

沙巴教会协会

P.O. Box No 444, 88856 Likas Post Office, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### THE PRIME MINISTER MUST ACT AGAINST RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

We call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to urgently rein in extremism in our midst as religious intolerance has reached a dangerous level.

We are reminded that it was the Prime Minister himself who first mooted the noble idea for building a "Global Movement of Moderates" from all faiths to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism, and to marginalise the extremists in his maiden speech at the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2010.

We are also reminded that he repeated this call nearly two years later at the inaugural International Conference on the Global Movement of Moderates organised by the alumni of the International Islamic University of Malaysia. We were encouraged by his assurance then that, "the time has come for moderates of all countries, of all religions to take back the centre, to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism, and to marginalise the extremists."

The world has taken note of Malaysia's message of reclaiming the middle ground from extremists. It was only last month that British Prime Minister David Cameron praised Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak for uniting moderates in the fight against extremism at the 9th World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) in London and for inspiring people across the world in the fight against extremism.

However, back in our own backyard we are experiencing extreme action against the Church in Malaysia. We find the recent judgment by Court of Appeal wholly unreasonable, irrational and repugnant and hence we reject it. It is up to the Federal Court now to do the right thing.

We concur with our brother churches in Sarawak in their recent statement that, "It is our view that the judges overstepped their boundaries in determining that using the word 'Allah' is not integral to the Christian faith. In deciding thus, the judges arrogated to themselves a right that does not belong to any human court of law — the right to determine religion."

Article 11 (1) of the Federal Constitution spells out the constitutional guarantee that every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and to propagate it, and among other things, the right to manage its own religious affairs.

This right includes the right of Christians to decide for themselves questions about Bible translations including rendering the word 'God' as 'Allah' in the Alkitab, our Malay language Bible. No state or federal authority has any power or right over the exclusive ecclesiastical authority that lies solely with the Church in Malaysia as guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and mandated by Holy Scriptures.

With due respect, the recent statement by Selangor Royal Council secretary Hanafisah Jais that the use of the word 'Allah' in the Alkitab and in the Bahasa Malaysia edition of the Catholic Herald be stopped immediately needs urgent clarification as it raises concern over the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.

It must be remembered that the usage of the Alkitab and the word 'Allah' are matters under the constitution and federal laws whereas Islam is a state matter under the respective sultans.

State laws and gazette orders made by the respective state Islamic Religious Councils apply only to Muslims in these states and not on federal laws or non-Muslims.

Sabah is unlike the nine Malay states. We have repeatedly said under the terms of the 20-points to the Malaysia Agreement, Sabah is to continue enjoying complete freedom of religion after the formation of Malaysia in 1963. The Church in East Malaysia is much, much, older than Malaysia itself.

Therefore, we expect others will honour our fundamental right to complete freedom of religion regarding the practice and expression of our faith and ministering of our fundamental sacraments of our religion as well as our liturgy, worship and teaching of our Holy Scriptures to our children.

We conclude by giving our assurance that we will resolutely join the Prime Minister's efforts to build a Global Movement of Moderates. We too reject religious extremism. We, therefore, call on him to restore the middle ground for religious tolerance and to respect the constitutional rights of non-Muslims to freedom of religion and the right to manage their own affairs. ENDS.



BISHOP DATUK DR THOMAS TSEN  
President, Sabah Council of Churches  
Date: 26 Nov 2013 Kota Kinabalu.

This statement is issued in conjunction with the "Mamangkis" celebration and the Public Forum on the 'Allah' issue jointly organised by the Sabah Council of Churches, Pastors' Fellowship Kota Kinabalu and NECF COSA (National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Commission on Sabah Affairs) held at the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia in Likas, Kota Kinabalu.

*Mamangkis is associated with the traditional Sumazau dance of the Kadazan, Dusun and Murut (KDM) indigenous people groups in Sabah. The pangkis is a shrill shout by the dance leader as a cue for dancers to change the dance pattern. KDM Christians have contextualised this popular dance as their expression of faith in their praise and worship with singing, dancing and joyous shouting using words in Psalms or Biblical songs, hymns, and poetry like in Psalm 20:5 " May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory and raise a victory banner in the name of our God. May the LORD answer all your prayers." (Kami mau bersorak-sorai tentang kemenanganmu dan mengangkat panji-panji demi nama Allah kita; kiranya TUHAN memenuhi segala permintaanmu).*