

Issue a betrayal of Malaysia Agreements – ACS

by Churchill Edward, reporters@theborneopost.com. Posted on November 14, 2013,
Thursday



UNITED WE STAND: (From left) John Ha, Bolly, Steward, Dr Su, Lawrence, Ng and Ambrose.



HUGE TURN-OUT: A section of the forum participants at the Christian Ecumenical Worship Centre Kuching.



Prof Dr Jayum Jawan

KUCHING: Churches in Sarawak yesterday affirmed in front of about 1,500 forum participants their stand on the recent ban of the word ‘Allah’ in the Catholic weekly bulletin ‘The Herald’.

Association of Churches (ACS) in Sarawak chairman Archbishop Datuk Bolly Lapok said the Bumiputera Church would continue to use the word ‘Allah’ as it is fundamental to all aspects of their profession and practice of the Christian faith.

“Any attempt to forbid the use of the word ‘Allah’ by non-Muslims would be most regrettable and wholly unacceptable as it is a flagrant disregard and betrayal of the Malaysia Agreements that guarantee the inalienable rights of non-Muslims in Sarawak and Sabah to complete religious freedom.”

Bolly, who is also Archbishop of the Province of South East Asia, Council of Churches Malaysia acting president and Christian Federation of Malaysia deputy chairman, said these rights must be given its rightful place and that religious bigotry, racism and extremism must be contained.

Accompanying Bolly on stage at the Christian Ecumenical Worship Centre here were Catholic Archbishop Datuk John Ha, Iban Methodists of Sarawak president Rev Steward Damat, Chinese Methodists president Datuk Dr Su Chii Ann, Seventh Day Adventist Mission chief Lawrence Banyie, Salvation Army chief Major Francis Ng and ACS secretary-general Ambrose Linang.

The forum featured three speakers, comprising constitutional lawyer Lim Heng Seng, Dr Ng Kam Weng – an authority on theology and historical perspectives over the use of the word ‘Allah’, and Universiti Putra Malaysia political science lecturer Prof Dr Jayum Jawan.

Bolly said the word ‘Allah’ had been in use long before the birth of Malaysia and it is used in all aspects of the Christian faith and practised by Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians in services, prayers, praise and worship liturgy and religious education.

“As such, it is reasonable to expect that the word also be used in our Christian publications and multi-media resources.”

There are 1.6 million Bumiputra Christians in Sarawak and Sabah, and they use Bahasa Malaysia and their native languages in their worship.

Bolly said it made no sense that only Christians in Sarawak and Sabah may use the word ‘Allah’ because Christians from both states worked or live all over the country and carry with them their Alkitab and other Christian materials in the Bahasa Malaysia language.

Even non-natives from the peninsula own and read the Alkitab as Bahasa Malaysia is the national language, he said.

Bolly said: “It is our view that the (appellate court) judges had overstepped their boundaries when they ruled that using the word ‘Allah’ was not ‘integral to the Christian faith’”.

“It is the fundamental right of every religion to determine its expression and practice of its own faith. As such, the ‘Allah’ controversy is about unreasonable government policies and laws that infringed on the rights of non-muslim Malaysians to practise their religion of choice.

“In the face of such unreasonableness we cannot and should not remain silent.”

ACS, he said, viewed with grave concern the re-interpretation of Article 3 of the Federal Constitution by the Court of Appeal to mean that non-Muslim religions may only be practised in peace and harmony subject to Islam.

“We do not believe this was ever the original meaning of Article 3, which simply states that other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.”

Bolly said there was a need for a tangible commitment from the authorities concerned to respect and uphold the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Federal Constitution.

He thanked Chief Minister Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud for recently stating that Allah is a non-issue in Sarawak.

ACS, he added, was also most encouraged to know that many members of the State Legislative Assembly had expressed their dismay and deep disappointment over how the Allah issue was handled.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church has filed for leave to appeal to the Federal Court against the Court of Appeal's decision. The church has raised 26 questions of law in the leave application.

Read more: <http://www.theborneopost.com/2013/11/14/issue-a-betrayal-of-msia-agreements-acs/#ixzz2kbuHOXan>

[Dr Edmund Sim](#)

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West Malaysian politicians and top government officials there kept assuring Sarawakians and Sabahans that this pertains only W. M'sia. However, the future and wider implications of this discriminatory ruling is still a concern. Intelligent people would know this. It is not something the Christians of Sabah and Sarawak can just accept at face value. So, well done, to the leaders of the Association of Churches in Sarawak. Boldness, unity and consensus among all denominations are very important now. Thank you, Archbishop Datuk Bolly for standing up for us and for religious freedom in this country.