

Nationwide Campaign on Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia – Shah Alam Conference

The first conference in the nationwide campaign on reforming political financing in Malaysia was held on 5 August at the Concorde Hotel, Shah Alam, Selangor with support from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The theme for the conference was the “Reform Agenda for Political Financing in Malaysia: The Challenges”. The conference comprised a forum with six prominent panelists and a workshop for views on political financing reforms.

Datuk Paul Low, President of TI-M gave the welcome remarks. The conference was moderated by Josie Fernandez, TI-M's CRINIS Project Director and Professor Dr Edmund Terence Gomez of Universiti Malaya. The opening address was given by YB Elizabeth Wong, Selangor State Executive Council member who represented YAB Tan Sri Dato' Sri Abdul Khalid bin Ibrahim, Chief Minister of Selangor.

Among the 70 guests and participants were representatives of the Election Commission (EC), Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), representatives from political parties, academics, NGOs, academicians, researchers and political analysts.

Datuk Wira Haji Wan Ahmad bin Wan Omar, EC Deputy Chairman lamented the limitations of the EC in making reforms due to inadequate laws in curbing political corruption. Tuan Haji Mustafar bin Haji Ali, Director of the Investigation Division, MACC noted that the public still views the MACC as a government tool because of its lack of prosecuting powers. There is a need to introduce a new Anti-Corruption Act to establish a new commission with more powers to fight corruption.

Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS) representative, YB Khalid Samad, Member of Parliament for Shah Alam stressed that all political parties need to be more transparent. He said that a change of government is needed to address the manner in which political funding is sourced. He added that the government should acknowledge the need for funds by political parties, NGOs, and others in order to reduce the unscrupulous methods used to obtain funds.

YB Tony Pua of Democratic Action Party (DAP) noted the ownership of media by political parties which gives them an unfair advantage during general elections.

Professor Gomez said that in March 2008, the country witnessed a democratic awakening but the concern in political financing is covert funding (including slush funds) and foreign funding. He urged the public to help political parties run their campaigns in a transparent manner.

For the workshop, participants were divided into three groups to discuss specific themes on reforming political financing. Among the themes were: enhancing the autonomy and independence of the EC, direct state funding for political parties to finance electoral and non-electoral activities, eradicating money politics in party elections and disclosure mechanisms and the role of civil society in promoting free and fair elections.

The discussions were followed by a session chaired by Professor Gomez which saw each group presenting their findings and views on the themes.