

Nationwide Campaign on Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia – Penang Workshop

Following the success of the Shah Alam conference, the Northern region workshop was held on 9 October 2010 at the Traders Hotel, Penang. The workshop was organised with support from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The workshop was aimed at mobilising public support for TI-M's initiative to reform political financing in Malaysia. TI-M also wished to raise public awareness on the subject and its detrimental effects on society. Public support is vital to achieve a sustained and systematic reform of political financing.

The workshop was well attended with 51 participants. They included Members of Parliament, members of the Penang State Legislative, representatives from local governments, academia, professional bodies, corporates, civil society and media and members of the public. Datuk Paul Low, President of TI-M gave the welcoming remarks.

The workshop comprised two sessions, first a forum discussion, then a presentation of TI-M's research and recommendations for reforming political financing in Malaysia. The panelists for the forum were Y.A.B Lim Guan Eng, Chief Minister of Penang and Datuk Wira Haji Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, Deputy Chairman of the Election Commission of Malaysia (EC). The forum was moderated by Datuk Paul Low.

Similar to the earlier workshop in Shah Alam, Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad lamented the constraints and limitations on the EC in dealing with political corruption and money politics. Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad attributed the ineffectiveness of the Commission to the inadequacies and loopholes in the present law. There is an urgent need to initiate legislative and institutional reforms to empower the EC to tackle political corruption and money politics.

YAB Tuan Lim discussed the Democratic Action Party (DAP)'s fundraising, by sales of dinner tickets and grassroots donations; also shared by the other Pakatan Rakyat component parties. He stressed the necessity for the EC to remain relevant and independent, and be seen by the public to be independent. He suggested that the EC be more vocal in criticising candidates and parties that commit election-related offences, especially with regard to political financing.

Questions were raised from the floor, particularly to the EC expressing disappointment at the ineffectiveness of the Commission to act as an independent body. For instance, YB Liew Chin Tong, the DAP Member of Parliament from Bukit Bendera stressed the pressing need for the EC to have members who are former judges and not former civil servants. Another

participant highlighted the contradictory explanations given by the EC on the decision of the polling date and budget allocation for the upcoming Galas by-election.

The second session commenced with a presentation by Datuk Paul Low on TI-M's research and initiative to reform political financing in Malaysia. Participants were invited to voice their comments and recommendations on TI-M's efforts thus far. The majority of participants echoed and supported TI-M's efforts, and urged TI-M to undertake the lead role in electoral reform.