

## **Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia East Coast Region Workshop (Kuala Terengganu)**

A workshop with members of the public was organised by Transparency International – Malaysia (TI-M) at Kuala Terengganu on 15 January 2011. The workshop which had the format of a public forum was part of the *Crinis* project funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The main objective of the forum was to meet the public and raise public awareness on the issue pertaining to political financing. More than 150 invitations were sent to various stakeholders including Members of Parliament, members of the Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu State Legislative, local governments, academia, professional bodies, corporate, civil society and media. Flyers were also distributed at public areas to publicise the event with the general public.

The panelists for the forum were Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, Deputy Chairman of Election Commission of Malaysia (EC), Col (R) Shaharudin Othman, Deputy Chairman of Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (MAFREL) and Dr Wong Chin Huat, Steering Committee Member of BERSIH 2.0. Mr Alan Kirupakaran, Executive Director of TI-M moderated. Unfortunately, the event was lowly attended. Due to the low turnout, TI-M took the opportunity to have a roundtable discussion with panellists on strategies to reform political financing.

The roundtable discussion was very fruitful as the panellists were given more time for an open and free-flowing exchange of ideas and opinions. Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad was very supportive of the proposal to reform the EC, but he stressed that the decision is in the hands of the government of the day. He also called for the enactment of a special law on regulating political financing as there is no law regulating it currently. The ideal solution would be the enactment of a Political Parties Act which would allow the EC to oversee and monitor political parties' activities. However, he was not agreeable to the implementation of direct state funding. He opined that the practice would encourage establishment of small parties with no proper ideology and representation for the sake of getting the public funding. It would be wastage of public money.

On the other hand, Dr Wong grouped TI-M's 22 recommendations on reforming political financing into eight categories. He undertook to synchronise TI-M's proposals with BERSIH's stand, to prioritise the recommendations and to identify workable recommendations. The eight categories were:

1. "One legislation" that covers all election related matters, i.e. establishment of the EC, conduct of elections, election offences, etc
2. "Reforms in reporting", particularly on parties and candidates' incomes as well as their expenditure
3. "Regulation on electoral expenditure"
4. "Regulation on political donation"
5. "Introduction of direct state funding"
6. "Administrative neutrality"
7. "Fairer access to media"
8. "Conduct of party election"

Dr Wong believed that the reforms could be done in stages and the EC could start amending some regulations to present election laws as a beginning of the reforms. For instance, the EC could amend the laws to enhance the reporting of electoral expenditure and have it certified by independent auditors.

Meanwhile, Col (R) Shaharudin was more concerned with media reform, particularly the new media. He was not sure whether new media should be regulated. On the issue of priority, he felt that all the recommendations are urgent; therefore he did not indicate any priority.