

Launch of “Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia” Publication

On 23 May 2010, Dato’ Sri Abu Kassim Mohamed, Chief Commissioner of Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) launched the TI-M book and national campaign on reforming political financing in Malaysia. The book is based on pioneering work undertaken since 2009 on the financing of politics in Malaysia. The project was supported by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

The book is based on primary and secondary research undertaken in 2009. Interviews were conducted with senior politicians, such as former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, former cabinet ministers Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Seri Dr. Chua Soi Lek, members of parliament, and political analysts. Information obtained from a national conference on political financing and validation workshops on the research organised by TI-M enriched the book. In addition, secondary data such as literature review provided a more thorough and insightful analysis on the political financing scenario in Malaysia.

More than 100 participants representing Election Commission, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, government agencies, foreign missions, funders, political parties, NGOs, academicians, political analysts and the media attended the event.

The Launch had three major components, namely, a Forum entitled “The Way Forward in Reforming Political Financing”, launch of book and nationwide campaign. The panelists were Tuan Haji Mustafar Haji Ali (Director of Investigation Division, MACC), Datuk Wira Haji Wan Ahmad Wan Omar (Deputy Chairman, Election Commission), Datuk Hafarizam Harun (Legal Counsel, UMNO), YB William Leong Jee Keen (Treasurer, PKR) and Professor Dr. Edmund Terence Gomez (University Malaya). Ms. Josie Fernandez, Director of Policy, Projects and Campaigns for TI-M chaired the forum.

The panellists raised a number of important issues: money politics is a global issue that required great attention, lack of legislation to regulate the problem, the Election Commission (EC) is powerless in the current situation to address the problem of money politics, EC needed stronger legislation to be effective in addressing the problem of money politics, political parties do not like to be regulated, all parties should voluntarily refrain from election "goodies" prior to and during the polling period, a complete overhaul of election offences related legislation in order to deal with money politics, the worrying trend of the political-business nexus and ownership of media by political parties which are the major causes for political corruption.

The participants raised several pertinent and interesting questions on corruption and money politics in Malaysia. They raised the following: why the government could not be charged under the Election Offences Act 1954 for vote-buying practices in elections, political corruption is a sophisticated and organised crime which needs to be eliminated immediately, the EC and the MACC have to cooperate to eliminate money politics, instead of working individually. A participant suggested that TI-M carry out projects that are grassroots-based to educate members of the public on the importance of reforming political financing.

In his speech at the launch, Dato’ Sri Abu Kassim thanked TI-M for its effort in conducting research on reforming political financing in Malaysia. He emphasised the importance of eliminating money politics as money politics is the mother of all corruption. The MACC was not only trying to eradicate money politics in general and by-elections, but also within party

elections. MACC believes that political parties and civil society are integral in achieving reforms in political financing. Dato' Sri Abu Kassim also quoted a paragraph from the book, which reads: *"In countries where political corruption is rampant, 'people become disempowered politically, economically and socially and, in the process, further impoverished. Leakages through corruption compromise a country's economic growth, investment levels, poverty reduction efforts and other development-related advances'."*