



Concept Note

Open Forum on the Issues of Palestine: Campaigning for Human Rights and International Law – What is Malaysia's Role?

19 March 2024 (Tuesday)

Lecture Hall A, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur & Zoom Platform

1. Background

- 1.1. The 75th Human Rights Day was celebrated on 10 December 2023, in conjunction with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 which was a result of the terrible experiences witnessed around the world during World War II. After the end of the war, and after the United Nations (UN) was established, the international community vowed not to allow such atrocities to happen again.
- 1.2. However, fast forward 75 years later, presently, the global situation has not improved as the armed conflicts and humanitarian crises have escalated worldwide, and the international community once again witnesses the turmoil of the conflict in Palestine which reached its peak since 7 October 2023.
- 1.3. Reflecting on the date of 10 December 1948, which was approximately 75 years ago, the world adopted the UDHR as a document serving as a guide and reference on human rights. For instance, Article 3 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of a person¹. Ironically, for at least the past 75 years², the people in Palestine have struggled to enjoy their basic human rights as outlined in the 1948 UDHR.
- 1.4. Nowadays, the increased awareness of the conflict in Palestine is a testament to global human rights and humanitarian issues. The loss of life and property, including women and children proves that these issues have gone far beyond religious and nationalist sentiment alone. The increase in the number of protests and objections to attacks on the Palestinian people has occurred worldwide on a scale never seen before.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Article%203,liberty%20and%20security%20of%20person.>

² In reference to the Nakba 1948

- 1.5. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) is also not exempted from expressing views and demands on this issue via two separate press statements on 10 and 20 October 2023. Through these media statements, SUHAKAM condemned the attacks and violence carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people, especially women and children. SUHAKAM urged an immediate ceasefire and opening of borders to allow for aid and humanitarian missions to enter Gaza.
- 1.6. SUHAKAM also believes that Malaysia, as a member of the international community can play a crucial role by leveraging its diplomatic influence, participating in international forums, and providing humanitarian assistance. Malaysia is also able to work by engaging with other countries and organizations to build a broad coalition committed to addressing human rights issues in Palestine and to seek a fair and sustainable resolution to the conflict, including through existing international instruments such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- 1.7. SUHAKAM welcomes South Africa's action to bring Israel to the genocide proceedings at the ICJ through a media statement dated 15 January 2024. The Malaysian government, based on a media statement issued on 27 January 2024 welcomes ICJ's decision in the case brought by South Africa against Israel under the Genocide Convention of 1948, instructing Israel to take immediate steps as follows:
 - 1.7.1. To prevent the commission of genocide in Gaza, in accordance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention;
 - 1.7.2. To ensure with immediate effect that its military does not commit any acts of genocide;
 - 1.7.3. To prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide;
 - 1.7.4. To enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life in Gaza;
 - 1.7.5. To prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of genocide; and
 - 1.7.6. To submit a report to the ICJ on all measures taken to give effect to the Order within one month.
- 1.8. At the same time, as the support for the Palestinian people escalated, there was also some group that seemed to be forgotten. The results of the meeting between SUHAKAM and the Palestinian Ambassador in Malaysia on 6 November 2023, revealed that some Palestinian residents or refugee communities in Malaysia are facing difficulties in accessing education. Additionally, there are Palestinians in Malaysia with valid travel documents but at risk of becoming undocumented as their documents have expired and they cannot return to Palestine due to the ongoing conflict there. A similar situation has previously occurred with Myanmar workers who refused to return after their work permits expired during the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, out of concern for their safety.

2. Objectives

2.1. Hence, SUHAKAM proposes to organize an '**Open Forum on the Issues of Palestine: Campaigning for Human Rights and International Law – What is Malaysia's Role?**', with the objectives as follows:

- 2.1.1. To raise awareness among the Malaysian public on the current human rights and humanitarian situation in Palestine, including but not limited to issues related to the rights to life and property, freedom of movement, the right to equal treatment under the law, access to health, education, food, and clean water;
- 2.1.2. To explore initiatives that Malaysia can undertake, especially as a member of the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and a member of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) 2022 – 2024, to promote peace, justice, and the rights of the Palestinian people; and
- 2.1.3. To review the roles that all parties can play in global humanitarian issues, including refugees and asylum seeker issues, and action that can be taken at domestic, regional, and international levels, such as providing access to shelter, education, and health.

3. Participant

3.1. Participants of the forum consisted of all parties who are in solidarity with Palestine coming from diverse backgrounds such as government agencies, academics, human rights defenders (HRDs), activists, students, and the general public.

4. Agenda

Date : 19 March 2024 (Tuesday)
Time : 4.30 pm – 7.30 pm
Venue : Lecture Hall A, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya & Zoom Platform

Time	Agenda
4.30 pm	Registration
5.00 pm	Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Ragunath Kesavan, Vice Chairman SUHAKAM
5.10 pm	Keynote Speaker <ul style="list-style-type: none">• YB Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad Bin Haji Hasan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

Time	Agenda
5.20 pm	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Open Forum on the Palestine Issue: Human Rights Campaign dan International Law – What is Malaysia’s Role?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“The Role of Malaysia as an International Actor and a Member of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict”</i>- Mr. Edmund Bon Tai Soon, former Representative of Malaysia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, AICHR (2016-2019) • <i>“The Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) during Conflict and Refugee Issues in Malaysia”</i> – YM Tengku Mohamed Fauzi Tengku Abdul Hamid, SUHAKAM Commissioner • <i>“The Increase of Awareness on the Issues and Possible Solutions for the Palestine-Israel Conflict”</i> - Prof. Dr. Syed Farid Alatas, National University of Singapore (NUS) • <i>“The Role and Initiatives by Malaysian NGOs and Assistance that can be provided by Malaysian Citizens”</i> – Ms. Lubna Sheikh Ghazali, Legal Services and Solutions Manager, Asylum Access Malaysia. • Moderator: Melisa Melina Idris, Host, Astro Awani <p>Q&A Session</p>
7.00 pm	<p>Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Dato’ Noor Aziah Mohd Awal, SUHAKAM Commissioner
7.15 pm	<p>Photo Session</p> <p>Iftar at Dataran Sejarah</p>