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**SUHAKAM CONCERNED OVER INVESTIGATIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS  
DEFENDER AND CALLS FOR A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO FREEDOM OF  
EXPRESSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

**KUALA LUMPUR (1 AUGUST 2026)** - The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) expresses concern over the police investigations involving environmental activist Shakila Zen, who has been called to provide a statement in connection with a social media post allegedly linking the Pahang royal institution to sand mining activities.

According to reports, the investigation is being conducted under Section 500 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA). While SUHAKAM recognises the legitimate role of law enforcement in investigating alleged offences, any action taken must be necessary, proportionate and consistent with Malaysia's obligations to uphold human rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed under Article 10(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution and recognised under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). While Malaysia is not yet a party to the ICCPR, Article 19 reflects internationally recognised standards on freedom of expression. Although this right may be subject to lawful restrictions, such limitations must be necessary, proportionate and should not discourage legitimate public discourse on matters of public interest.

Environmental defenders play a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability and public participation in environmental governance. By drawing attention to environmental risks and the impacts of development on affected communities, they contribute to informed public discourse and strengthen environmental governance through greater scrutiny and accountability. This is consistent with Malaysia's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR), which emphasises transparency, meaningful stakeholder engagement and the protection of environmental rights to ensure that development is undertaken responsibly and sustainably. Individuals advocating for environmental protection should therefore be able to carry out their work freely and safely, without fear of intimidation, harassment or reprisals.

The United Nations General Assembly, through Resolution 76/300, recognised the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a universal human right. This right is also affirmed at the regional level through the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, which underscores the commitment of ASEAN Member States to environmental protection and the enjoyment of environmental rights. The effective enjoyment of this right depends on the protection of procedural environmental rights, including access to information, public participation, access to justice, and the ability to freely express concerns relating to environmental matters.

SUHAKAM also notes with concern reports that Shakila Zen has previously been subjected to threats and harassment in connection with her advocacy work. Human rights defenders should be afforded effective protection against threats, violence, and other forms of retaliation arising from the peaceful exercise of their rights. In line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, States have a responsibility to ensure that individuals and organisations are able to promote and protect human rights in a safe and enabling environment. This includes safeguarding the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and participation in public affairs, particularly on issues affecting the environment and the wellbeing of communities.



## **MEDIA STATEMENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (SUHAKAM)**

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SUHAKAM therefore calls upon the relevant authorities to ensure that any investigation is conducted fairly, independently and in accordance with the principles of necessity, proportionality and due process. The Commission further urges all authorities to ensure that laws are not applied in a manner that creates a chilling effect on legitimate environmental advocacy or discourages public participation in matters concerning environmental protection and sustainable development.

SUHAKAM remains committed to promoting and protecting human rights for all and reiterates that protecting environmental defenders and preserving civic space are essential to advancing environmental justice, sustainable development and the enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

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**Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)  
1 August 2026**