PETALING JAYA: Seventeen NGOs have called on the Government to have a nationwide consultation with the transgender community as soon as possible in order to better understand their issues.
It said transgender people such as Aleesha Farhana, or known by his actual name of Mohd Ashraf Hafiz Abdul Aziz, 25, faced extreme levels of stigmatisation and discrimination in Malaysia.

These abuses, ranging from physical violence to mental torture to sexual assault, happen from when we were children right up to our adulthood,' said a statement endorsed by 17 NGOs and 600 unnamed individuals yesterday.

Among the NGOs that endorsed the statement were Amnesty International (Malaysia), Association of Women's Lawyers, Centre for Independent Journalism, Coalition of Sexual Bodily Rights, Seksualiti Merdeka and Suaram.

It said the discrimination was often perpetuated by biased media reporting, which fuelled further hate towards this group of people.

They expressed shock over the death of Ashraf and unhappiness over the court's judgment in not allowing him to change his name and gender to Aleesha Farhana after undergoing a sex change in Thailand two years ago.

Ashraf died on Saturday after suffering from a heart attack, 12 days after the High Court ruled that there was no legal statute to grant his application based solely on a sex-change operation.

The statement said the lack of attempts to understand the transgender community had resulted in many being kicked out of families, schools and jobs.

'We were also prevented from accessing health services, housing, education, employment and other basic rights enjoyed by all Malaysians,' it said.

'Without the law on our side, we are left without legal recourse to redress any injustice and abuse we suffer.'

The NGOs urged the authorities to take necessary measures and immediately act to create an enabling and safer environment for transgender people.

It said Aleesha and all Malaysian transgender people deserved the same opportunities as others to improve the quality of their lives and pursue their dreams.

This includes the repeal of the laws that criminalises transgender people for their identity, dressing and mannerisms.