

 Friday, April 17 2009, KUALA LUMPUR: The Government has just over two weeks to ensure that Suhakam complies with the Paris Principles or the recommendation to downgrade it from its **A** status will be made.

The Accreditation sub-committee of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) found that the Suhakam (Amendment) Bill 2009, passed by the Dewan Rakyat the day before Suhakam's review in Geneva on March 26, still fell short.

We received a letter from the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights last week telling us we have 28 days to challenge the observations of the sub-committee, said Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman told The Star.

If no action is taken, the sub-committee will recommend to the ICC that Suhakam be downgraded.

On what could be done since the Bill was now awaiting Royal Assent, he said he had written to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak since he was the minister in charge then.

I'm sure with his slogan that he will listen to the people's views, we can hope for the best, he added.

In reviewing Suhakam last year, the ICC found it was not up to par with the Paris Principles and issued a notice last April of a possible downgrade if improvements were not made by March 26.

It wanted Suhakam's independence to be strengthened by a clear and transparent appointment/dismissal process in the Suhakam Act, for commissioners to serve longer than two years and for them to represent different segments of society. But the Government's Bill in response still fell short of the Paris Principles, said Abu Talib.

The Paris Principles are a set of core basic recommendations adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 on the status and functioning of national human rights institutions (NHRIs).

An **A** status accreditation means that a NHRI complies with the Paris Principles and is able to participate directly in all meetings of the UN Human Rights Council; **B** means it is not fully compliant and has observer status only; and **C** means total non-compliance.

Abu Talib said Najib had agreed to Suhakam's recommendation for a selection committee to advise the Prime Minister on the appointment of commissioners and for their tenure to be extended to three years.

But the Bill that was passed included Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and stated the Prime Minister is not bound by the committee's opinions. We were not informed or made aware of these.

Acknowledging it was not possible to amend the amendments in the time given, Abu Talib said the Government could use Section 22 of the Act to instead draft regulations for giving effect to the provisions of the Suhakam Act.