

 Sat, April 18 2009 : The Government has just over two weeks to ensure that Suhakam complies with the Paris Principles failing which 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 in an interview.

On what could be done since the Bill was now awaiting Royal Assent, he said he would write to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

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.

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.

Because of the time constraints, Abu Talib said the Government could instead draft regulations for giving effect to the provisions of the Suhakam Act.