

Sept 10, 2009, Thu - KUALA LUMPUR: Human rights violations continue to occur almost on a daily basis in Malaysia, says Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman.

As an advisory body without executive power, he said, there was nothing Suhakam could do to ensure the Government responded to and acted upon on its recommendations.

Abu Talib noted that although the Government had made significant improvement since the Suhakam Act became law on Sept 9, 1999, Malaysia did not have a perfect human rights record.

Abu Talib said this in his keynote address at Suhakam's Malaysian Human Rights Day celebration yesterday. The theme was Human Rights in Malaysia: The Last 10 Years.

He reminded participants at the celebration that Suhakam was a creature of statute and that the solution lay in the hands of Malaysian voters.

If you vote the right people into Parliament, they will amend the law to give us teeth to bite with, he said in response to a question from the floor.

Earlier, in his speech, Abu Talib said Suhakam's probe into complaints of abuses such as police inaction, excessive force, selective prosecution, death in custody, delays in citizenship applications and denial of rights to ancestral land found that most of these were legitimate.

To many government employees, it would appear that the Universal Declaration (of Human Rights) is very remote from their everyday working lives, he said.

He cautioned the Government that quelling dissenting voices and a free and open media would only encourage whispering campaigns that would result in social unrest.

Stressing that religion could not or should not be legislated, Abu Talib urged religious leaders to promote tolerance and respect for others.

Asked at a press conference about the boycott of the conference by 42 non-governmental groups because, among others, Suhakam had refused to send a team to monitor the anti-ISA protest on Aug 1, Abu Talib said: It was not right for us to be there because the rally did not have a permit. We cannot act against the law.

We are for peaceful assemblies and we have recommended that the Police Act be amended so there is no need for a permit, he said.

Commissioner Datuk Dr Chiam Heng Keng, who is the organising chairman, clarified that representatives from 32 of the 42 NGOs had turned up.