

 PETALING JAYA: Malaysia must do more to protect the rights of its citizens as well as foreign workers, a human rights group said. Persatuan Promosi Hak Asasi Manusia (Proham) chairman Tan Sri Simon Sipaun said the situation of human rights in the country had gone from bad to worse. Press freedom in the country has plummeted by 10 in its ranking within a period of one year, he said adding that Malaysia was ranked 143 out of 196 countries surveyed worldwide in the latest Freedom of the Press Index report. In the region, Malaysia was ranked below Timor Leste, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia but above Singapore, Brunei and Vietnam. Simon said this during a round-table discussion on the US 2010 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Malaysia yesterday. The report listed instances whereby the freedom of press, association, assembly, speech, and religion in the country had been restricted by the Government in the past year. The report is prepared annually by the US government for the 193 countries which are members of the United Nations. Proham member Datuk Dr Raj Abdul Karim said the US government should also acknowledge what the Malaysian Government had done in terms of human rights. The Government has done a lot to reduce the country's maternal mortality rate due to its commitment to improve healthcare services in the country, she said, adding that the mortality rate was now only 31 out of 100,000 women. However, she said the child mortality rate was expected to increase due to changing trends in the country. Dr Raj said the changing trends were due to the increasing number of teenage pregnancies and pregnancy among foreign workers. In this country, it is considered illegal for foreign workers or migrants to get pregnant and they will immediately be sent back to their countries, she said adding that the strict policies led to more cases of baby dumping. She called for the Government to be more considerate and to introduce favourable policies for unwed pregnancies. There needs to be more openness in family planning services, she said, adding that it should not be restricted only to married couples.