

ERA Consumer Malaysia is a voluntary, non-profit and non-political organization registered under the Societies Act of Malaysia 1966. It was founded in the state of Perak in 1985 as a research, education, consumer and human rights advocacy group and subsequently expanded into a national organisation, with its base in Kuala Lumpur. ERA Consumer's earliest success was in getting the national Consumer Protection Act passed. However with our continuous work in this area and with our increasing capabilities to conduct community trainings, ERA Consumer has now a wide portfolio of programs. These include various human rights education programs.

ERA Consumer is the only organisation in the country to have translated various United Nations (UN) instruments on human rights into the national language of Bahasa Malaysia. These translated versions of the conventions are now being used by other NGOs when they conduct talks on human rights at the grassroots level. The UN treaties that have been translated into Bahasa Malaysia are; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These documents have been disseminated to all public libraries, college and university libraries, foreign diplomatic missions, foreign NGOs and resource centres of local political parties so that they have access to these documents in the language that is most widely used in Malaysia.

On a regular basis, ERA Consumer engages with civil society groups, such as Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), National Human Rights Society of Malaysia (HAKAM), Voice of the Citizens (SUARAM), Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM), Community Development Centre (CDC), Consumer Associations, Local based community organisations, political parties in government and as well as with the opposition parties in Malaysia on human rights issues and education.

ERA Consumer is one of the very few NGOs in the country working closely with the National Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM). We are a member of SUHAKAM's Education Working Committee, providing significant input for its HRE training modules for schools and the police force. ERA Consumer has also been invited to sit on SUHAKAM's Working Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. An important achievement for ERA Consumer was in getting school students to open up to the issue of human rights. In this project, we worked with SUHAKAM to organise an essay-writing competition for students aged between 15 and 17. This competition, being the first of its kind, was open to selected schools in the federal capital of Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas.

In 1999, together with the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, ERA Consumer organised a workshop on training programs for NGOs and in support of the investigative role of SUHAKAM. In the following year and soon after Parliament passed an Act to establish SUHAKAM, we organised a workshop involving NGOs on Understanding the HRC Act. Subsequently, ERA has held national consultations annually to assess the performance of SUHAKAM.

In 2003, ERA continued with its efforts to educate the public on human rights. Continuous human rights training programs targeting women and youth have been conducted all over the country. To date, ERA has trained 8,000 members of the public on human rights since 1998. These include members of political parties, from both the government and opposition. At the same time, ERA has also organised additional training for participants with emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights. These training programs are ongoing projects at ERA and conducted throughout the year.

In light of the recent events following the September 11 incident, there has been great interest generated in understanding the elements

## About Us

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of Islam. Islam, being the main religion in Malaysia, remains misunderstood. As such, ERA saw the need to address this and as a result we have been conducting an annual seminar on Human Rights and Islam. The main objective behind this seminar is to create a platform for non-Muslims and Muslims to openly debate on sensitive Islamic Principles. The first seminar was held at Tanjung Jara in Terengganu with the theme ♦Understanding Human Rights and Islam: Motivation, Ideology and Relevance in a Contemporary Society♦. The following year, ERA also conducted a similar program but with the focus on women. The theme this year was ♦An Islamic Perspective on the Impacts and Challenges to Women in the 21st Century♦. It was held at Kota Bharu in Kelantan, which is a stronghold of the opposition party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) since the early 1970♦s.

Besides education and awareness programs, ERA is also involved in grassroots community projects. We at ERA also recognise the need to empower community members of ethnic minorities. We have been selected by the European Union to set up community centres to empower and educate the Indian community in rural areas. In the course of this project, we have built links with community leaders, the grassroots community members as well as with other NGO♦s.

ERA consumer is also a member of the working group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism. This Working Group is an informal coalition of individuals and groups within the ASEAN region, working with government institutions and NGOs in the field of human rights. The Working Group♦s primary objective is the establishment of an inter-governmental human rights mechanism in Southeast Asia.

On the International level, ERA Consumer is a member of Forum Asia. ERA also works with the Canadian Human Rights Foundation and AsiaDHRRA (Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas) which is a coalition of South and East Asian NGOs working in the area of farmer♦s rights, Consumers International, South East Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade on food sovereignty and trade issues at a regional level.

In the area of standards, ERA Consumer acts as the consumer watchdog on the government panel working on the adoption of standards set by the International Standards Organisation. On Consumer protection issues, ERA Consumer collaborates with the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (FOMCA), the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and the Regional Office of the United Nations Development Program on environmental issues.

ERA Consumer Malaysia is involved with various committees and networks on a wide range of programs

- Member of Asia Pacific Research Network
- Associate Member of Consumers International
- Member of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development - 2000
- Secretariat for the Malaysian Working Group of an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism - 2000
- Member of the International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (ECSR - Net) - 2001
- Chair & National Member of the Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (SEA Council)
- National Co-ordinator of the Malaysian Committee on Food Security & Fair Trade
- Member of Asian Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (ASIADHRRA)