



United Nations Malaysia

## PRESS RELEASE

### **On Human Rights Day, UN Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to promoting non-discrimination for all Malaysians**

*Seminar provides platform for government and non-government representatives to discuss the way forward for human rights in Malaysia*

**Kuala Lumpur, 8 December 2009** - In conjunction with Human Rights Day 2009, (which officially falls on 10 December), the United Nations in Malaysia today hosted a human rights seminar that brought together government and non-government stakeholders in a constructive dialogue to discuss the state of human rights in Malaysia.

Opening the event was Kamal Malhotra, UN Resident Coordinator for Malaysia, who said, "International human rights standards embody universal values of respect for human dignity and human well-being, and this year's theme which is to *Embrace Diversity, End Discrimination* underscores the fundamental principle of non-discrimination that is at the core of our understanding of what human rights are about."

Mr. Malhotra emphasized human rights as being at the core of national human development policies and strategies, and stressed that continued dialogue on human rights through events such as this would do much to promote meaningful engagement between government and non-government stakeholders in their collective efforts to realize human rights in Malaysia.

"Given that human rights provide the foundations for a humane, as well as a just and progressive society, the United Nations country team once again reaffirms its long-standing partnership with the Malaysian government and other local partners in its commitment to and continued support for the human rights aspirations of Malaysia and its people," said Malhotra.

The one-day seminar, themed "*Embrace Diversity, End Discrimination*", featured experts and opinion leaders from the UN, government and civil society, including a special address by Tan Sri Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, and an update on the state of human rights in Asia and the Pacific by Pablo Espiniella, Representative of the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) regional office in Bangkok.

There was also a panel discussion moderated by Marina Mahathir, featuring well known speakers such as Tunku Abdul Aziz, founder and former president of Transparency International (Malaysian chapter), and Andrew Khoo, council member and co-chairperson of the Malaysian Bar Council's Human Rights Committee.

The seminar also aimed to provide a platform to discuss necessary follow-up action to various human rights developments in Malaysia, including the 2009 Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council which took place in February 2009.

All UN Member States have ratified at least one (1) of the core human rights treaties, with 80% of States having ratified four (4) or more treaties, which reflect the collective consensus of States and create legal obligations for them by giving concrete expression to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There are nine (9) core international human rights treaties, of which Malaysia has signed and ratified two (2), which are:

- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - Ratified in 1995 with reservations; and
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - Ratified in 1995 with reservations.

Malaysia has also signed but not yet ratified the more recent 2006 UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The 2009 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) found that Malaysia still had a considerable distance to cover. As a member of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations urges Malaysia to follow through on its promises and implement changes that will have a real impact on the protection of human rights in the country.

Speaking on the way forward for human rights in Malaysia, Mr. Malhotra said, "I am hopeful that the discussions at this seminar will provide an opportunity for national human rights stakeholders to highlight the relevant issues and country-level concerns that have a bearing on the assessment of human rights and which should contribute to the design of policy responses and an action plan for implementing human rights in Malaysia."

#### About Human Rights Day

The United Nations Human Rights Day, celebrated annually worldwide on 10 December, advocates human rights-based development for all people. This year's global theme "*Embrace Diversity, End Discrimination*" reflects the UN's efforts to advocate for non-discrimination by raising awareness about all human rights and reaching out to local communities.

The date of 10<sup>th</sup> December was chosen to honour the United Nations General Assembly's adoption and proclamation, on 10 December 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the first global enunciation of human rights. The commemoration was established in 1950, when the General Assembly invited all states and interested organizations to celebrate the day as they saw fit. Human Rights day is celebrated to promote the universal human right to live and to do so peacefully.

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About the United Nations in Malaysia

*United Nations Technical Assistance programmes date back to the time of Malaysia's Independence in 1957, focusing on specific areas such as health and nutrition, education curriculum development and the establishment of the country's telecommunication base. The UN Country Team in Malaysia is headed by the Resident Coordinator, who brings together all specialised funds and agencies dealing with operational activities for development, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations University (UNU).*

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