

19 April 2016

## Malaysia – Sentencing of human rights defender Haris Ibrahim

On 14 April 2016, human rights defender Mr **Haris Ibrahim** was sentenced to eight months imprisonment by the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court for allegedly giving a seditious speech in 2013.

[Haris Ibrahim](#) is a lawyer and a member of the steering committee of the **Negara-ku People's Movement**, a movement initiated by a coalition of sixty-eight non-governmental organisations. In the face of growing political extremism in Malaysia, the movement aims to counter misinformation and promote an all inclusive society free of discrimination.

On 14 April 2016, the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court found Haris Ibrahim guilty of making seditious statements during a gathering at the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in 2013. According to the Court, the comments of the human rights defender were aimed at influencing Malaysians to oust the government through unlawful means. Haris Ibrahim was convicted under Section 4(1)(b) of the Sedition Act 1948 and sentenced to eight months imprisonment. Although there was an option to issue a fine over an imprisonment sentence, the Court refused to opt for the fine. According to the defence, the Court disregarded the poor health of the human rights defender as well as the fact that it was his first criminal offence. In 2015, the Sedition Act was amended to provide for mandatory imprisonment over a fine, however the amendments entered into force after Haris Ibrahim had been charged on 29 May 2013. The human rights defender was subsequently released on bail, for the sum of €2300, pending appeal to the High Court.

On 13 May 2013, Haris Ibrahim made a speech during a gathering at the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, expressing discontent at how the new government had been formed. In his speech the human rights defender referred to the 2013 election, when the Barisan Nasional political party retained federal power, despite losing the popular vote, by gaining the majority number of seats in the Parliament. Haris Ibrahim does not regret giving the speech, stating that he simply expressed the public's discontent with the outcome of the election.

The Sedition Act 1948, inherited from the British colonial government, is regarded by many human rights defenders in Malaysia as an affront to human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and the rights of citizens in a democratic state. The government of Malaysia previously made promises to repeal the law, but instead in 2015 it passed amendments to the Act, which lowered the burden of proof for prosecution, allowed control over online media content and imposed a mandatory jail term for the crime of sedition.

Front Line Defenders is concerned about the sentencing of Haris Ibrahim, which it believes is linked to his legitimate and peaceful role in the Negara-ku People's Movement.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Malaysia to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally quash the conviction of Haris Ibrahim, as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been convicted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful role in the Negaraku People's Movement;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Malaysia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.