

17 April 2019

Malaysia: Numan Afifi summoned for questioning by police over speech delivered at UN

On 16 April 2019, human rights defender **Numan Afifi** was asked by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) to present himself on 26 April at the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman in relation to an investigation into a speech that he had delivered at the United Nations in Geneva last month.

[Numan Afifi](#) is a human rights defender who has advocated tirelessly for LGBT+ rights in Malaysia. He has actively contributed to issues ranging from democracy to HIV advocacy through his involvement in the Pelangi Campaign, the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the UPR Process (COMANGO) and Challenger.

On 16 April 2019, the human rights defender was contacted by an inspector from the Classified Crimes Investigation Unit, which investigates cases that fall under the Sedition Act. Numan Afifi has been asked to present himself at the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman on 26 April 2019 to provide a statement regarding a speech presented at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva during the Consideration of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Outcome of Malaysia on 14 March 2019. Other civil society organisations had also presented statements at the conference.

In Geneva, Numan Afifi read out a statement on the situation of LGBT+ rights in Malaysia. The statement, which was a response to Malaysia's UPR submission, had been prepared by a coalition of 12 Malaysian organisations working on gender identity and sexual orientation. It commended the government on its acceptance of one of the recommendations regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, and raised concerns about the rejection of the other 10. The statement also called for the government and civil society to have a dialogue on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The human rights defender has not been told whether the police investigation concerns his speech alone or if other civil society organisations present at the conference are involved as well. To date, no official charges have been lodged against him.

On 17 April 2019, a smear campaign has been launched against him by pro-government groups on social media, alleging that the statement he had presented at the UN conference contained inaccurate information. The human rights defender is being pressured to retract his claims regarding the existence of state-sponsored violence against LGBT+ people in Malaysia.

In June 2017, Numan Afifi was barraged with online criticism, harassment and death threats after organising a “gay breaking fast” event during the month of Ramadan to show solidarity to the LGBT+ community.

Human rights defenders working on LGBT+ issues in Malaysia have been facing an ongoing, intense backlash from both the general public and the state, despite the promises of increasing the state's compliance with human rights standards, made by the new government elected in May 2018. Media reporting on the Women's March, which was held in Kuala Lumpur on 9 March 2019, disproportionately harped on and criticised the fact that some of the demonstrators were carrying placards and chanting slogans in support of LGBT+ rights, and a member of parliament called the show of solidarity an “abuse of democracy”. Further, after the Women's March, on 14 March 2019, the police called in seven organizers for questioning and an investigation for sedition charges has been opened.

Front Line Defenders recognises the summoning of Numan Afifi for interrogation as part of a backlash against human rights defenders working on LGBT+ issues in Malaysia and is deeply

concerned by the restrictions they face in carrying out their peaceful and legitimate human rights work both locally and abroad.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Malaysia to:

1. Immediately cease the investigation of Numan Afifi as it is believed that it is solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take measures to ensure that government officials, other public figures and organisations refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
3. 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, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5 (b and c): *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups; (c) To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations”*, and to Article 7: *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director