

**Malaysia: Activist arbitrarily stopped from leaving country to receive human rights award**

(Bangkok, 16 May 2016) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) believes that the unlawful and arbitrary decision of Malaysian authorities to stop democracy activist Maria Chin Abdullah from travelling to South Korea on 15 May to receive a human rights award is a brazen violation of her basic freedoms including freedom of movement. She was on her way to Gwangju, South Korea, to receive a human rights award on behalf of Bersih 2.0.

Immigration officials at the Kuala Lumpur international airport barred Maria Chin Abdullah, Chairperson of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih), from travelling to South Korea to receive the 2016 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights. Bersih 2.0 is one of the two recipients of this year's award, along with Vietnamese human rights defender Nguyen Dan Que.

This is the second time in six months that a Bersih 2.0 activist has been banned from leaving Malaysia. On 3 December 2015, Bersih 2.0 steering committee member Hishamuddin Rais was not allowed to leave the country under similar circumstances. He was travelling to South Korea, as part of a FORUM-ASIA international human rights monitoring delegation.

*"Bersih strongly condemns the authorities stopping Maria Chin Abdullah from leaving the country to receive the Gwangju prize. This human rights award is an international recognition of the Malaysian democratic movement. We demand the Government explain why she was stopped,"* says Mandeep Singh from the Bersih 2.0 secretariat.

This move by the Malaysian authorities has restricted Maria Chin Abdullah's freedom of movement, as stipulated in Article 9 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, and is in violation of Malaysia's international obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*"The travel ban on Maria Chin Abdullah is unambiguous signal from Malaysian authorities that they will act against anyone who is considered to be critical of the Government,"* says Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA, *"The right to freedom of movement is a fundamental human right that has been enshrined in international law. The Government needs to honour its human rights commitments and facilitate a vibrant space for all civil society actors in Malaysia."*

The travel ban on Maria Chin Abdullah is just another crude tactic used by the authorities to curtail the legitimate work of human rights defenders. Activists involved with organising the Bersih 4.0 rally, such as Hishamuddin Rais, Mandeep Singh, Adam Adli, and Nik Nazmi, have been charged under the Sedition or Peaceful Assembly Act, and are facing judicial harassment.

FORUM-ASIA calls on the Malaysian authorities to lift this arbitrary travel ban on Bersih 2.0 members, and focus on instead do more to protect freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association.



## **About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organisations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Kathmandu and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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