



Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

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“HARI MERDEKA” AND “HARI MALAYSIA” 2015

Brothers and Sisters,

We celebrate our Independence Day this year with the theme ‘*Malaysia, Sehati Sejiwa*’ (Single Minded Malaysia) to reflect the spirit of solidarity, understanding, togetherness and humanity of all people in the country.

Our nation’s Founding Fathers envisioned a country which would possess its own uniqueness, governed by its people on the principles of fair and free democracy, with a future shaped by its own citizens, and laws that manifest the will of the people.

We thank Almighty God for the many blessings He has showered upon our nation and for the relative peace and harmony we enjoy in this beloved country of ours. We are appreciative of the various development that have been achieved for the progress of our nation.

Malaysians are generally understanding, caring and charitable, as noticed by their response to natural disasters such as the earthquake in Sabah and the floods that hit the country not long ago, and also when sharing the grief of MAS flight MH 370 and flight MH 17 tragedies. The warm tradition of having ‘open houses’ where people of different faiths visit the homes of those who are celebrating their festivals, augurs well for unity between the different races.

However, after more than five decades of independence, we are witnessing many distressing events in our country. There is a clear erosion of the very fabric of the ideals dreamt of by our Nation’s Founding Fathers. People at all levels of society are confounded and are questioning whether the rule of law embodied in our nation’s legislations to safeguard the rights of its people and wealth of the nation are given any regard.

Human rights, freedom of expression and the liberty of the social media are increasingly subject to severe restrictions by administrative actions. The democratic voice of dissent is being stifled, ironically on the ground that they are against parliamentary democracy. These cumulative events coupled with the lack of check and balance by the relevant institutions and the disregard of basic fundamental liberties, have generated much disquiet and anxiety among the general public.

The current political situation in our country is rather disturbing. Today, various groups across the country are calling for an end to the autocratic ways of the government of the day, and demand that it govern the country with fairness, transparency, accountability and integrity, besides insisting for a free and fair election system. The nation's leaders are called to defend the rights of all peoples in our country, including the minorities, the migrants and the refugees.

We are indeed concerned for the well-being of our nation that was once a flourishing economy but now, facing a serious financial challenges. The debt-laden 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), the Goods Service Tax (GST), the depreciation of the Malaysian ringgit have been cause for alarm across the country. The spiraling cost of living has become burdensome to the people, especially the poor and the needy. Remedial measures are truly and seriously needed if people were to have confidence in the nation's fiscal strategies.

We are equally perturbed by the religious extremism and intolerance of certain individuals and groups in our country today. The perpetrators making racist and religious slurs behave as though they are beyond the reach of the law. Racial polarization and religious bigotry in whatever form, are detrimental to national unity. Political will is necessary to promote and articulate moderation. The G25 and other like-minded groups are to be commended and supported for daring to take a stand against extremism and to promote values that build up and unite the peoples. Political, community and religious leaders and others must engage with those causing dissension to reject their prejudicial thinking in favor of a balanced mindset. Understanding, goodwill and trust among the races are vital for solidarity in our multi-cultural society.

What role then, can the Church play in influencing our environment and enforcing the principles of natural justice and inculcating spiritual and moral values for the good of our society?

The Book of Proverbs (31:8) emphasizes the obligation to "speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute... judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy". It is our bounden duty then, to seek justice for the helpless and to come to the aid of the most vulnerable in our society.

Pope Francis has composed a prayer for the *Jubilee Year of Mercy* which runs from 8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016. He entreats the Lord to make the Jubilee Year of Mercy, a year of grace so that the Church "with renewed enthusiasm may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind".

The Church prompts its members to respond to the gospel mandate to be the “salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt.5:13-14). Deeds rendered out of charity and mercy as well as championing the cause of truth and justice, can have a strong impact in the rejuvenation of our society.

We call upon the faithful and all people of goodwill to play their rightful role in the process of nation building. It is their inalienable right as citizens to deliberate, communicate and act on matters of societal concern, be they political, social or economical. The Christian community, guided by the teachings and direction of the Church, are called to uphold spiritual and moral values as they live out their obligation to enhance peace and harmony in our society. Law makers and those who implement the law are urged to exercise their civil duties, with fear of God and respect for the human person.

May the spirit of “*Sehati Sejiwa*” inspire the leaders of our nation and all its people of diverse races and cultures to work selflessly in resolving the nation’s challenges, and to strive with steadfast will to make Malaysia a truly united and harmonious nation, guided by the principles of the *Rukun Negara* and safeguarded by the sacrosanctity of our *Federal Constitution*.

On these auspicious occasions of Hari Merdeka and Hari Malaysia, let us offer up our humble prayers for our King, all political and civil leaders at the Federal and State levels and for all the peoples of Malaysia. May the peace and joy of our Lord fill our heart as we place our trust in Him.

SELAMAT MENYAMBUT HARI MERDEKA DAN HARI MALAYSIA!



Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim, D.D.
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur
President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia on behalf of :

Most Reverend Dato John Ha	Archbishop of Kuching
Most Reverend John Wong	Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu
Rt. Reverend Dr. Paul Tan	Bishop of Melaka-Johor
Rt. Reverend Sebastian Francis	Bishop of Penang
Rt. Reverend Datuk Cornelius Pion	Bishop of Keningau
Rt. Reverend Datuk Julius Dusin Gitom	Bishop of Sandakan
Rt. Reverend Richard Ng	Bishop of Miri
Rt. Reverend Joseph Hii	Bishop of Sibiu