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## **SCC: Undertake serious reform to alleviate Christians' concern**

Borneo Post Online (11.05.2016) - <http://bit.ly/23KeGBp> - Sabah Council of Churches (SCC) has called upon the federal and all state governments to undertake a serious reform on all the relevant legal procedures to alleviate the deep concerns and anxieties of the Christian community in Malaysia, especially those in Sabah and Sarawak.

Its president Rev Datuk Jerry Dusing said through a press statement that Sabah and Sarawak in recent years had struggled to navigate the ambiguous and uncertain state of the law on religious freedom.

"We believe that for the sake of religious harmony and national unity, it is time for reforms to be implemented respecting and in accordance with the Report on the Inter-Governmental Committee 1962 and Malaysia Agreement 1963," he said, adding that SCC stood with Association of Churches in Sarawak, the Christian Federation of Malaysia and Kuching Ministers' Fellowship on the issue over the appeal by the National Registration Department (NRD) against the decision of the Kuching High Court in the case of Roneey Rebit.

SCC is disappointed with the NRD in filing an appeal only to withdraw it in the 11th hour after Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Adenan Satem requested Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to instruct the department to reconsider its decision. The leaders' decision could not have been made at a better time because it was only a few days before the Sarawak state election.

"We are extremely disappointed with the action of the National Registration Department in appealing against the decision of the Kuching High Court, in the case of Roneey Rebit, to allow Roneey to be recognised as a non-Muslim in his identity card," said Jerry.

"The action of the NRD is highly suspicious and puzzling in view of the non-objection of both the Sarawak Islamic Religious Department and the Sarawak Islamic Council to Roneey's application.

"While we commend the sensible actions of these Sarawak Islamic authorities, we denounce the action of the NRD for its audacity in challenging the constitutional right of religious freedom of our fellow brother.

"The withdrawal of the appeal by the NRD was made only after the intervention of Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Adenan Satem in the midst of Sarawak's election campaign. This turn of events clearly project two things – firstly, the NRD which is an administrative arm of the federal government has no regard and respect for our religious freedom guaranteed under the Federal Constitution and the Malaysia Agreement 1963. Secondly, our exercise of religious freedom is subject to political interference."

One of the pillar(s) and foundation of the formation of Malaysia is the guarantee of freedom of religion to Sabahans and Sarawakians.

"We are inherently multi-religious and any attempt to restrict our religious freedom and re-engineer our demographics to a single religion – more than it being unconstitutional – transgresses the international treaty of the Malaysia Agreement 1963.

"The Malaysia Agreement 1963 is an international treaty signed by five nations – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Federation of Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore – registered in the United Nations (Treaty Series No. 10760).

"The provisions of the Federal Constitution and its implementation must be aligned with the Malaysia Agreement 1963. Therefore, any provision of our national law and any administrative action which are contrary to the Malaysia Agreement 1963 would be a breach of an international treaty."

He said in the Cobbold Commission Report dated June 21 1962, even the Malayan members of the Cobbold Commission, in their recommendations on the topic of religion, after considering the various views expressed by the people of North Borneo and Sarawak, said as follows: "Taking these points fully into consideration, we agree that Islam should be the national religion for the federation. We are satisfied that the proposal in no way jeopardises freedom of religion in the federation, which in effect would be secular."

Roneey's case is a clear reflection of many of our people's plight, Jerry said, adding that in Sabah, many of the people's sense of identity had been affected, time wasted, liberties damaged, and happiness robbed by fraudulent conversions and the insistence of the NRD in its stand as in this case.

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## **Kota Kinabalu, Islamic proselytizing of children in Catholic schools**

AsiaNews/Agencies (20.02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1oWXf3p> - Catholic school pupils are being pressured to convert to Islam, according to Sister Rita Chew, president of the Educational Commission of the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu (Sabah Region, East Malaysia). The religious denounces an increasingly aggressive presence of Muslims in schools run by the Church: "Some people seem very interested in bringing forward Muslims programs in our elementary schools."

Local sources said that Islamic proselytism activities take place in all schools of the country, with the exception of private schools, and do not even spare Catholic institutions. Several episodes also show a widespread prejudice against non-Muslim students. "Our fear - continues Sister Chew - comes from the fact that conversions take place, but the government denies this fact. Some Christian parents have found that their children are taught Islamic prayers. "

According to the religious, these proselytizing activities are aimed at a "recovery" of the Islamic regions of Sabah and Sarawak, where Christians account for a good percentage of the population and where there are the most Catholic schools. Of the 448 Christian and missionary institutions in Malaysia, 130 are in Sarawak and 98 in Sabah.

Catholic schools, however, are greatly respected in Malaysia. A retired teacher, interviewed by UCAN, states that Muslim parents often choose schools run by the Church for their children, as they are considered centers of excellence when compared to those state: "In those - says the man, who wants to remain anonymous - the only focus is on exams and results, it is not an open and well-rounded education, which is what parents want for their children".

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