



APWLD calls for stop to attacks and threats against Malaysian electoral reform activist targeted for being a woman human rights defender and minority Hindu

18 July 2012: Ambiga Sreenevasan, a Malaysian Indian Hindu leader of a civil society movement calling for free and fair elections, is currently the target of severe and sustained harassment and intimidation because of her legitimate human rights activities. APWLD is particularly concerned about gender-specific violations and threats towards Ms. Sreenevasan by both State and non-state actors. Ms. Sreenevasan has been facing threats since 2011, and the harassment is now intensifying as she is being subjected to threats at her private home, calls for her death and deprivation of her citizenship, from a local politician and other group leaders.

Ms. Sreenevasan and Abdul Samad Said are the co-chairs of the civil society movement, the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (known as BERSIH). BERSIH is a coalition of 84 non-government organisations unaffiliated to any political party (<http://bersih.org>). While both co-chairs have been publicly vocal leaders of the BERSIH movement, only Ms. Sreenevasan has been the target of escalating harassment and attacks which focus on her gender and her ethnicity and religion.

Threats and harassment include those committed in early May 2012, where images of Ms. Sreenevasan were burned at gatherings of local groups opposed to the activism of BERSIH. The exterior of her home was damaged, with protestors shouting "Go to hell Ambiga, go to hell you Hindu infidel". She has been referred to as "the anti-Christ for Muslims" in quotes in newspapers. When asked why they were targeting Ambiga specifically, and not BERSIH co-chair Abdul Samad Said, chairman of the group Jamal Md Yunus replied "*Kita lihat, kita suka Ambiga. Dan kita lihat dia ini lebih cantik daripada orang lain. Kami minat dengan dia. Kita suka tengok dia*" ("We like Ambiga. She is prettier than other people. We take interest with her. We like to see her.").¹ She has also recently been subjected to sexual harassment by members of Malay Armed Forces Veterans Association (PVTM) who conducted "bottoms exercises" 15 May outside her home. On 26 June, a local politician publicly called for her to be hanged for her "treasonous" act of organising the 28 April rally for free and fair elections. Ambiga's activism in defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms of LGBTIs render another justification for threats against her. A prominent political party leader made a clear remark that as Muslims they will declare a war against Ambiga's activism and not keep their mouths shut. On 1 July, Ambiga confirmed to the media that she has received an email advising her to be careful. It was reported that the email allegedly said, "Beware hired guns out to kill you", and claimed that a particular group had contracted two thugs to "terminate" her.

Please see the attachments for a summary of threats against her.

APWLD, as a member of Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, notes with grave concern how threats and violations against Ambiga are sexualised and multiplied based on her intersecting identities - gender, religion and a firm belief on universal human rights for all.

¹ "Demo di rumah Ambiga: Penganjur lelong petak penjaja," Malaysiakini, May 21 2012 (<http://malaysiakini.tv/#/video/23945/demo-di-rumah-ambiga-penganjur-lelong-petak-penjaja.html>)

APWLD strongly condemns any threats and intimidation of Ms. Sreenevasan as a woman human rights defender and as a woman of a religious minority in Malaysia. We call on the Government of Malaysia to:

- Acknowledge the work of Ambiga Sreenevasan as a woman human rights defender and provide full protection to her family, and any other human rights defenders under threat.
- Immediately conduct a comprehensive investigation into the threats against Ms. Sreenevasan and take action to the fullest extent of the law against those responsible.
- Ensure the human rights, freedoms and security afforded to her and her family under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion, assembly, association and expression.

##

Organisations endorsing our statement

Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)
Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)
Front Line Defenders
INFORM, Sri Lanka
National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders (NAWHRD) Nepal
Sri Lanka Human Rights Defender Network
Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)

Annexes:

Summary of threats against Ambiga Sreenevasan 2011- 2012
Attacks and threats against BERSIH co-chair Ambiga Sreenevasan in 2012

APWLD is Asia Pacific's leading feminist, membership driven network. We hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Our 180 members represent groups of diverse women from 25 countries in the region. For 25 years APWLD has been empowering women to use law as an instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development. We use research, training, advocacy and activism to claim and strengthen women's human rights.