

THE OUTCOME OF THE GIAT GOOD GOVERNANCE AGENDA FOR GE14



Press Statement

GIAT Good Governance Agenda for GE14: THE PILLAR TO REFORMING MALAYSIA'S FUTURE

In light of the upcoming 14th General Elections, GIAT (Governance, Integrity, Accountability and Transparency) – a coalition of civil society organisations that consists of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), the Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4), Sinar Project, Transparency International Malaysia, the Society for the Promotion of Human Rights (PROHAM), Friends of Kota Damansara, and MyPJ has recently launched its Good Governance Agenda for GE14 (GE14 Agenda).

The GE14 Agenda proposes five key reforms which are fundamental to ensuring that Malaysia would function with high standards of integrity, openness, and transparency. GIAT through its GE14 Agenda calls on all political parties to pledge their commitment to promoting, upholding, and implementing these reforms should members of their political parties win the elections and get elected to positions of power.

The proposed key reforms are:

1. Endorse legislation that will affirm the independence of institutions, most importantly the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the Attorney General's Chambers.
2. Enact a national Freedom of Information law, review the Official Secrets Act 1972 and adopt open data principles.
3. Require by law that all cabinet members, Members of Parliament, elected officials and senior public officials to publicly declare their assets.
4. Improve participatory democracy within all levels of government, including budgeting processes and holding local council elections.
5. Require by law that all political parties publicly declare all forms of income and expenditure.

In bringing the GE14 Agenda forward, GIAT had met with five political parties namely Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu), Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM). These meetings sought to advocate for the key reforms embodied in the GE14 Agenda to be incorporated into the parties' election manifestos and realized in the event their members win the elections.

It is noteworthy that the meetings were concluded on a positive note and the political parties generally agreed that the demands put forth by GIAT are in line with democratic principles they subscribe to – principles meant to achieve good governance which ought to be promoted and upheld in a democracy.

While we note that some of the demands, for instance the need for strengthening local government by holding local council elections have to a certain extent been watered down, we believe that further engagement on this matter is urgently needed to address unresolved issues. This engagement would enable all stakeholders to explore ways to effectively overcome the obstacles that are currently preventing the full realization of the reforms in question.

We however wish to register our disappointment in the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) as they have yet to respond to our request to meet to discuss the key reforms in the GE14 Agenda. One of our GIAT members, Cynthia Gabriel had by chance met with the MCA Chief of Legislature Bureau for Negeri Sembilan, Ng Kian Nam at a forum in Seremban on April 8th where he was asked about GIAT's GE14 Agenda. In response to the question, he agreed that good governance was essential and pledged to realize the demands concerning asset declaration and political financing.

It is worth reminding that as the ruling coalition the past 6 decades, the Barisan Nasional especially, has an obligation to seriously consider the reforms proposed in the GE14 Agenda given its prior commitment to realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular principles stipulated under Goal 16 (promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, the right to information, the provision of access to justice for all, combatting illicit financial flows and fighting bribery, corruption, as well as building effective, accountable institutions at all levels) which are in consonance with GIAT's GE14 Agenda.

Instead of showing the way towards greater openness and accountability, the passing of the Anti-Fake News (AFN) law has served a crushing blow to Malaysia's already restrained environment to promote good governance and access to justice for all. The AFN law would without a doubt adversely crush freedom of speech and expression which is instrumental in creating space for civic engagement and investigative journalism. We emphasize yet again that transparency is the best arbiter of fake news.

GIAT would like to take this opportunity to particularly applaud Bersatu being the first of the Pakatan Harapan parties to receive our GE14 Agenda and for having proposed the adoption of all the key reforms proposed by GIAT in the Pakatan Harapan's GE14 Manifesto. This move is indeed a positive step forward in the right direction as it would pave the way for building a nation that upholds principles of good governance.

The Barisan Nasional's GE14 Manifesto offers a number of curious reforms which are key to achieving good governance such as the introduction of a political financing law and the creation of an ombudsman to investigate public complaints concerning public institutions, including public petitions of more than 30,000 signatures, will now definitely receive a formal response from the authorities. While we acknowledge these promises, it is inevitable that this question is asked: why were these reforms not implemented before given the Barisan Nasional's 6- decade-long rule?

While Parti Warisan Sabah had also promised to incorporate the essence of reforms into their manifesto, PSM has said that all items were already part of their reform agenda.

We also note the critical fall of local council elections off the Pakatan Harapan's GE14 Manifesto this time, and note with disappointment the vague language of amending the local government act, without any further details.

In light of the mostly affirmative feedback given by the political parties, GIAT truly urges for the proposed reforms in the GE14 Agenda to be pursued with the highest degree of commitment and not end up as a mere public relation exercise.