

Y.B. Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil
Menteri Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga Dan Masyarakat
Aras 1-6, Blok E
Kompleks Pejabat Kerajaan Bukit Perdana
Jalan Dato' Onn
50515 Kuala Lumpur.

Via email and post

9 May 2005

Dear Dato' Seri Shahrizat,

It heartened me to read in the newspaper (The Star, 1 May 2005) that you took the trouble to personally understand the plight of the disabled. I suffered spinal cord injury and have been in a wheelchair for the past twenty years. Only one who has "walked" in our shoes can truly understand the problems that we, the disabled, are going through, even then not all.

It is a jungle out there and it is vicious. Our forays outside the comfort of our homes are always a walk into the wilderness. The public amenities are simply not sufficient to cater to our convenience. There are obstacles all the way. You have lived a few hours as one of us and you can already see the immeasurable hurdles we have to traverse. We have to go through that everyday in a wheelchair or being visually impaired. Still, I applaud you for taking this initiative. It means a lot to us to know what you are concerned enough to want to understand what we are confronted with day in and day out.

I laud the government in coming out with the various legislations to improve access and welfare for the disabled. There has been tremendous improvement from twenty years ago when I first became paralysed. However, more can be done. Implementation and enforcement must be taken seriously. Ramps must be built strictly to specifications. I have often come across ramps that are too steep and without railings. Public transport must be accessible to the disabled. Not all of us can afford to own a car or a modified motorcycle. There are more. I am sure the various organisations for the disabled have a list of issues that their members are facing which need to be addressed.

However, first and foremost in my mind is a plan to systematically evacuate people like me who are living in high-rise dwellings in the event of a disaster. I am staying alone in apartment on the 20th floor. My evacuation options are limited. I have pointed out in my blog that people who live in high-rise do become old. People who live in apartments do become disabled. We are staying put despite the circumstances because this is all we can afford.

We have suffered two major earthquakes and many more aftershocks within a short period of three months. The risk of the structural integrity of high-rise buildings being compromised has become a reality. Lives are at risk every time there is a major tremor in a neighbouring country. Another thing is that several minor fires have also broke out where I live, unrelated to the earthquake, still a scary notion no doubt. I shudder to think what will happen if there is a major fire.

There is an urgent need to set up a plan to help those who need assisted-evacuation should anything like a fire or an earthquake happen again. There are 544 units of apartments here with a few thousand residents. Imagine the severity of the problem should a catastrophe occur. Now imagine how many high-rise there are in Malaysia and we can begin to see the immensity of the situation.

I have written two letters to the developer cum building manager here asking them to come out with a contingency plan in the event of a fire and other emergencies but they have not responded. Their priorities are placed elsewhere. They “invested” large amounts of our sinking fund into unit trusts without our knowledge and approval. They allowed vehicles to be parked in the driveway that impedes the easy access of fire engines and ambulances into the premises. They arbitrarily reserve parking lots for themselves in the common property by building collapsible barriers to prohibit others from parking there. In short, we have a building manager who could not be bothered with the safety and welfare of the residents here.

On the whole, this evacuation plan will not only help me alone but the thousands of physically disabled, the elderly, the pregnant and those who have problems with mobility living and working in high-rise buildings all over Malaysia. These people will inevitably need help to be moved to safety in the event of a disaster. We cannot consider ourselves a masyarakat penyayang without taking into consideration the plight of the less fortunate and mobility-impaired fellow citizens from all possible angles. Something constructive must be done and it must be done urgently.

Therefore, I respectfully urge you to look into drawing up this systematic evacuation plan for the sake of all those who need it without delay. With the resources that your Ministry possesses together with the cooperation and expertise of other relevant agencies, I am certain something practical can be worked out. Let us not wait until there is a tragedy before we start doing something.

At the same time, Mack Zulkifli (<http://www.brandmalaysia.com>) has begun an online banner campaign to promote this cause in his blog. There are currently 26 blogs that are displaying the banner, some with entries that have voiced concern regarding this issue. It will be great if we can publish a positive reply from your ministry regarding this matter in our blogs. I truly believe this is a worthy cause that will save many lives, especially the mobility-impaired, when the need arise.

We, the people known as orang kurang upaya, deserve to have our safety looked after as much others. Please do not look at us as just another statistic. After all, we are Malaysians too just like you and everyone else living here. Again, I humbly urge you to look into this matter and give it the attention it deserves. Every life is worth saving, more so of those who are unable to fend for themselves.

I look forward to receiving a favourable reply from you. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Tan
Kad Kenal Diri Orang Kurang Upaya
No. Pendaftaran: PH 021713

Copy: Y.A.B. Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon
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Pejabat Ketua Menteri Pulau Pinang
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10502 Pulau Pinang.

Y.B. Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting
Menteri Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan
Paras 3-7, Blok K, Pusat Bandar Damansara
50644 Kuala Lumpur.

Y.B. Goh Kheng Sneah
ADUN Batu Uban
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11900 Bayan Lepas.

Pengarah
Jabatan Bomba dan Penyelamat
Negeri Pulau Pinang
Jalan Perusahaan
13600 Perai.

Pengarah Tanah Dan Galian (Rujukan: PTG/PB/ADUAN/124)
Pejabat Tanah Dan Galian
Tingkat 21 & 22, KOMTAR
10000 Pulau Pinang.

Pengarah Bangunan-Bangunan (Rujukan: JB/AD/2/1819-1)
Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang
Paras 14, KOMTAR
Jalan Penang
10000 Pulau Pinang.

Persatuan Orang-Orang Cacat Anggota Malaysia (Ahli 1301)
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Taman Midah, Cheras
56000 Kuala Lumpur.

Chairman,
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31B-19-3, Lorong Pekaka Satu
11700 Gelugor.