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Persatuan Jasa Watan

(Google Translate: Watan Service Association)

Submission for Universal Periodic Review, Malaysia's 4th Cycle 2023

INTRODUCTION

Persatuan Jasa Watan (PJW) was established in 2021. Since then, the CSO has been committed to instilling and inculcating Malaysian citizens with the spirit of nationalism and patriotism, as well as focusing on the importance of national identity that is aligned with the Federal Constitution of Malaysia.

'Jasa' means the act of kindness or helping hand, and 'watan' is a homeland. Therefore, PJW is an association that is committed to serving the community on the national loyalty agenda and providing aid for Malaysian who are in need. PJW is also dedicated to educating the communities on Eastern values relating to statehood issues regardless of religion and race.

Leading by an obligation to spread humanitarian responsibilities and education for all, PJW is committed to helping the Malaysian community, especially during natural disasters such as floods. PJW has been actively collaborating with Akademi Watan to conduct seminars and workshops on national unity and social cohesion, including 'Formulating Malay Civilization'

and 'Hang Tuah: Facts or Myth?' - to ensure greater understanding, appreciation and awareness of the importance of national unity in ensuring the protection of human rights in Malaysia.¹

NATIONAL UNITY

A. National Unity through National Language and Education System

1. In Malaysia, Article 152 of the Federal Constitution states that the Malay language, or 'Bahasa Melayu,' is the national and official language² and is the basis of the national integration of all ethnicities living in Malaysia.³ The position of the Malay language as the national and official language is further fortified under the National Language Act 1967.⁴ Furthermore, the national language of Malaysia is a symbol of sovereignty, pride, heritage, and the "soul of the nation"⁵ in order to ensure national identity, social cohesion, and unity among Malaysians.
2. The most effective means to cultivate and advance the use of the national language amongst Malaysian citizens is through the country's education system, which functions as the primary medium of instruction.⁶ The dynamic environment in which students are immersed significantly influences their proficiency and development in the national language. The Ministry of Education and the Curriculum Development Centre have a pivotal role in dictating education policy, determining the importance placed on the national language in the Malaysian education system. Consequently, this affects how students perceive and apply the national language in their day-to-day interactions.
3. However, after going through 11 to 13 years of primary and secondary education, Malaysian still needs to be fluent in speaking in the national

language. Some are still prejudiced towards the national language, not their mother tongue. At the same time, some students need more interest in studying the Malay language because the language lacks commercial or academic value.⁷ This unfortunate situation gives a poor conception of national identity among Malaysians.

4. The Malaysian education system is highly focused on examinations, leading many students to study Malay solely to pass tests. This approach fails to instill a sense of patriotism or a deep understanding of the importance of national unity.⁸ Additionally, the diminishing role of the national language as a unifying force in education threatens the rights of Malaysians to come together as a nation. Without solid policies and enforcement to promote the use of the national language, it may become less widely spoken and further erode national unity.

5. Besides, the national identity of Malaysia was articulated in the **National Culture Policy 2021** (Daken 2021)⁹ and **National Unity Policy 2021** (DPN 2021)¹⁰. The Daken 2021's rational principles stated that the indigenous culture of the nation is the main and essential component of national building, but the country remains committed to catering and celebrating elements from other cultures through an ongoing process of adaptation and assimilation.¹¹

6. The Daken 2021 initiative is firmly rooted in Malaysia's National Culture Policy 1971 (DKK), Federal Constitution, and National Principles (Rukun Negara). This foundation is crucial in fostering harmony amongst the

diverse populace of Malaysia. The goal of Daken 2021 is to elevate Malaysia to a Developed Nation with Cultured People (*Negara Maju Rakyat Berbudaya*) in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDG's emphasis on inclusive development that leaves no one behind is instrumental in achieving this objective. Additionally, the Daken 2021 plays a vital role in promoting national unity and integration while reducing social conflicts resulting from historical and demographic changes in the Malay land.¹²

7. The same goes for DPN 2021, which aims to “strengthen national unity based on Federal Constitution and The National Principles... shape a national identity... [and] bring forth unity”.¹³ However, the Malaysian Government has shown little to no interest in enforcing and implementing the policies, reflected in the little progress in meeting those stated objectives.

8. After more than four decades since the first introduction of the policies and more than half a century since the inception of the Federation, fundamental and deep-rooted unity among the different ethnicities of the nation is still left with much to be desired. While living side by side, the different ethnic groups continue to live along parallel outlooks and narratives, leading to still very much segregated ways of life, resulting in continued clashes of fundamental values and worldviews, and in some incidences, have created disharmony and racial tension.

Concerns

9. These are intensified by the segregation in the education system, where children of different ethnic groups are being segregated along their ethnic mother tongues, i.e., children of Chinese descent mainly go to Mandarin Schools, where Mandarin is not only taught as a subject but also used as a medium of instruction throughout the primary school years; thus, students have very little exposure to their peers of other ethnicities.¹⁴

10. As of August 2021, almost 77% (from three million total students enrolled) of primary school students are enrolled in Vernacular Schools, where children as young as seven years old are segregated based mainly on their race.¹⁵ On top of that, many non-Malay students at vernacular schools could not converse in the national language, despite being born in Malaysia and living in the country.¹⁶

11. As of November 2021, the Malaysiakini news portal reported that vernacular students suffer from a lack of Bahasa Melayu proficiency,¹⁷ resulting in conflict, especially where there needs to be social interaction between them and the general public. Moreover, the segregated education system has resulted in students from vernacular schools showing less interest in learning the national language,¹⁸ ultimately leading to a weakened sense of national identity in Malaysia.¹⁹ Resultantly, many Chinese were not showing respect for speaking the Malay language when it mingled with other races.²⁰ Thus,

the impact on the vernacular schools brings adverse outcomes on national unity.²¹

12. In January 2022, various CSOs filed a notice of appeal over a High Court's decision that ruled privately-funded vernacular schools as constitutional,²² in spite of the fact that the Education Ministry has released RM48.52mil to these schools.²³
13. Apart from the segregation of the education system, PJW is concerned with severe detriment to national integration and unity with the existence of various bodies that dominantly focus on racial segregation thru education, such as the United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zhong),²⁴ which has been vocal in defending Chinese education, including fighting for the government's recognition of the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC).²⁵
14. In 2018, it was revealed that UEC fully uses a syllabus designed by a foreign country that is not based on Malaysia's education philosophy,²⁶ and its adoption would lead to segregation and compromise Malaysia's national identity.²⁷
15. The opposition to UEC also has been mentioned by the ex-prime minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, and he also asked for the Dong Zong association to be abrogated.²⁸ Not only that, but a petition also calls to ban Dong Zong.²⁹ It has become evident that advocating for a segregated education system, as Dong Zong does, is

not favored by the Malaysian community. This stance could potentially harm the trust and harmony within Malaysia's diverse, multicultural society.

16. Incidences of racial tension and discrimination have become rampant in Malaysia. Reports surfaced in 2019 regarding workplace discrimination, particularly in hospitals, where Malay physicians expressed discontent and unease over experiencing discrimination during meetings and discussions. Furthermore, a male employee felt discriminated against when his colleagues and superiors spoke only in Mandarin during meetings.³⁰ This would hinder teamwork and lead to better communication between doctors. It has reached an extent where the housemen and medical officers depend solely on whatever conclusions the Mandarin-speaking medical officers and specialists have arrived at because the housemen cannot participate in the discussions.

17. Also, it is important that elected officials or members of parliaments (MPs) in Malaysia have a proficient command of the Malay language.³¹ The lack of fluency in the national language, especially by the non-Malay MPs, perpetuates the distrust among the diverse population of Malaysia.³² As representatives of the local populace, it is fundamental for them to be well-acquainted with Bahasa Melayu in order to understand community concerns better and work harmoniously with local customs, traditions, government policies, and the needs of the local people. Many Chinese MPs, particularly those who

graduated from vernacular schools, struggle with parliamentary debates conducted in the national language and thus fail to fully deliver the community needs during the debates.³³

18. After two years (2021-2023) of the launch of Daken 2021 and DKK 2021, the government still needs a comprehensive listing of the national unity program or initiatives for public engagement. As for Daken 2021, only one program in 2022 is named 'National Cultural Policy Roadshow Programme and Empowerment of Non-governmental Organisations'³⁴. The same goes for DKK 2021; only three programs have been found associated with the execution of the policy: National Principle School Programme³⁵, e-Negarawan or Implementation of Statesman Exploration³⁶, and Malaysia MADANI Unity Campaign³⁷. However, the listed programs are not intensely promoted to the public. Consequently, as mentioned before, it does not give a better solution to the root cause of the national unity in Malaysia. The programs listed still do not address segregation education issues and non-Malay's poor proficiency in speaking the national language.

19. In order to address national unity challenges in Malaysia, it would be beneficial for the DAKEN 2021 and DKK 2021 development to involve civil society organizations (CSOs) from all races and religions who are committed to the national unity agenda. Allowing these CSOs to participate in discussions, provide feedback, and collaborate with ministries would lead to more inclusive solutions. It is important to avoid

selecting only certain CSOs, as this could create bias and exclude certain groups from the right to achieve national unity.

20. **Recommendations**

- I. Call for more public engagement in reviewing the implementation of Daken 2021 and DPN 2021, as well as ensure state-wide public consultation;
- II. To enforce and implement the National Culture Policy 2021 and National Unity Policy Blueprint 2021-2030 by obtaining feedback from various stakeholders;
- III. To strictly enforce the language requirement under the citizenship application at the National Registration Department (JPN);
- IV. To ensure that members of Parliament or assemblymen possess proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia or Malay language, both in speaking and writing;
- V. To enhance national unity by setting up national schools based on Bahasa Melayu as its singular medium of instruction, where school-goers are given the opportunity to interact and integrate while maintaining the right to teach and learn vernacular languages as a subject in those schools;

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VI. To ensure all learning institutions abide by the aspiration towards national unity, especially by drafting an education syllabus that affirms Malaysian identity without segregating the education system.

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¹² Ibid (No.10)

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¹⁵ Ibid (No.5)

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