

## Bersih Netherlands Summary Report 2018

The year started with the Borneo Case video screening and live forum with YB Maria Chin Abdullah (former Bersih 2.0 chairman) and Clare Rewcastle-Brown (editor of Sarawak Report) on 9 March 2018 at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands. The event was attended by about 50 researchers, students and activists.

We had a good discussion with Maria and Clare on topical issues such as the abuse of power by the current Malaysian government in land-grabbing, how 90% of the Malaysian rainforests have been replaced by hydro dams and palm plantations to benefit a small group of elite politicians, the draconian measures introduced in the Security Offences Act 2012 (SOSMA) whereby detainees under the Act may be locked up for an unlimited period of time without trial, and how USD651 million ended up in the private account of the Malaysian Prime Minister just before the 2013 General Election.



*Figure 1 – The organizing team with Nirmla Devi (Bersih Germany) and Clare Rewcastle-Brown*



*Figure 2 – Clare in person and Maria via Skype answering questions from the forum participants*

When the Malaysian General Election date was announced, Bersih NL joined in the “Balik Undi” campaign and raised funds to sponsor **five** students (first time voters) from **Sabah and Sarawak** to fly from their universities in West Malaysia back to their home to vote. Together with Bersih Germany and Bersih Belgium, our runners successfully couriered by air 27 ballots to KLIA, which were subsequently transported back to respective polling agents all over the country just one day before polling day itself! Thanks also to the Undi Rabu runners who carried our ballots to Kuantan, Alor Setar and Johor Bharu. The rest of the ballots were passed to family members in the Klang Valley or to Penang and Bukit Mertajam. Our team was also featured in a local newspaper (*China Press*)



Figure 3 – Bersih NL members collecting ballots at Schiphol Airport, which our runners hand carried back to Malaysia



Figure 4 – Bersih NL’s efforts were featured in a Malaysian newspaper. The headlines read: “You were late, but we still made it!”

In July 2018, Bersih NL has also initiated a meeting between H.E. Karin Mössenlechner, the Dutch ambassador to Malaysia, Shahrul Aman Mohd Saari (former Bersih 2.0 acting chairman) and Swee Seng Yap (former Bersih 2.0 executive director). It was the first time they met and spoke to each other, and we were pleased to make the introduction. The meeting lasted a lengthy 1.5 hours and we discussed about the current political climate and how to further the Bersih agenda.

Malaysian friends and families in the Netherlands came together on 17 August 2018 to celebrate Malaysia Baru with a potluck BBQ party. More than 30 people attended and it was a resounding success.



*Figure 5 – Summer potluck BBQ party*

With the change of government, the new Pakatan Harapan MPs are more approachable and open to NGOs involved in human rights issues. On 20 September 2018, Bersih NL joined 15 other NGOs and held a dialogue with Sarawak Members of Parliament. Organised by Bersih Sarawak, it aimed to create a platform for civil society organisations to introduce their areas of work as well as to lobby their issues and agenda for reform with the parliamentarians. More details on the event can be found here : <http://www.theborneopost.com/2018/09/20/ngos-hold-dialogue-with-sarawak-mps/?fbclid=IwAR2rkkz9OgspzvsylwNk0uY-vzE4ucP5y1AQjLcFAP2RCen9GTKsCx2CPlw>



*Figure 6 – Dialogue with new MPs in Sarawak, including the Transport Minister, Baru Bian*

The year ended with another successful event – a forum about Malaysia Baru held on 3 November 2018 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. We had the privilege to have YB Maria Chin (via Skype), Prof. Bridget Welsh and Dr Greg Lopez (via Skype) as our speakers and panel members. Prof. Welsh provided us a sharp and insightful analysis on the dynamics and significant events leading up to and during the 14th Malaysian General Election (GE14) in May 2018, how the historic change of government was made possible, and the forces and challenges facing the new government post-GE14. We also had other NGOs like BothENDS (<https://www.bothends.org/en/>) and Global Bersih chapters (Bersih Scotland and Bersih Germany) joining us for this event.



*Figure 7 – Our team and Prof Bridget Welsh during the forum session*

All in, 2018 was an exciting and fruitful year for Bersih NL and for Malaysians in the country and beyond its shores.