

CHAPTER III

THE EMERGENCE OF BERSIH 2.0

In this chapter, the writer explains about emergence of *Bersih 2.0* as the citizen movement demand of the clean government in Malaysia. *Bersih 2.0* has done several rallies in Malaysia and overseas since 2007 and continued in 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016. Each rally has the demand to realize free, clean and fair Malaysian government. Malaysian citizens felt mad because of the unfairness in the general election. Malaysian government is also considered unfair in implementing the government. Malaysia government always took side in *Barisan Nasional* side to impose UMNO's affairs. Regarding that issue, Malaysia citizens are disappointed. Finally, they make an alliance along with the opposition parties and several NGOs.

A. The Emergence

Basically, civil society of a country has a right to be fulfilled by its government. Civil society has a right to deliver their opinions or demands democratically if they didn't get their rights. Like in Malaysia, social protests frequently happened. Since the fraud happened in general election 2004, in response to the fraud, *Bersih* is established by the civil society organization and political parties with the objective of campaigning for electoral reform to realize of free and fair elections in Malaysia. Firstly, *Bersih* emerged in July 2005 as the coalition of free and fair election group. After the workshop was entitled "Advocacy and The Role of Opposition", the coalition of NGOs and Political Parties were making Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform and released on 23 November 2006 as the official launch of *Bersih* in Parliament House, Kuala Lumpur. The joint communiqué consists of NGOs endorsing such as: Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), Persatuan HAKAM, SUARAM, Aliran Kesedaran Rakyat (Aliran), Persatuan Ulama' Malaysia (PUM), Civil Rights Committee KLSCAH (CRC), Women's

Development Collective (WDC), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), ERA Consumers, Save Ourselves Penang (SOS), Tamil Foundation, Groups of Concerned Citizens, Citizens' Health Initiative (CHI), Writers' Alliance for Media Independence (WAMI), *Jeringan Rakyat Tertindak* (JERIT), EMPOWER (*Pusat Janadaya*), Community Action Network (CAN), Labour Resource Centre (LRC), Malaysia Youth and Student Democratic Movement (DEMA), *Pusat Komus*, Centre of Independent Journalism (CIJ), *Unit Pemikiran Politik* (UPP) - *Institut Kajian Dasar*, Malaysian Voters Union (MALVU), *Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam* (GAMIS), Research for Social Advancement (REFSA), *Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia* (SMM).⁶⁶

Not only NGOs which had join the Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform, several opposition parties except *Barisan Nasional* alliance joined the joint communiqué. Those parties are: *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR), *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS), Democratic Action Party (DAP), *Parti Sosialis Malaysia* (PSM), Sarawak National Party (SNAP).⁶⁷ The number of participations of this joint communiqué represented the anxiety of some Malaysian civil society who demand the free and fair on the election or government in Malaysia.

Bersih is lead by Maria Chin Abdullah from the NGO as the participation of Bersih Women Development Collective. *Bersih* has 5 done rallies in Malaysia as the demands for the good governance, free and fair on general election, and clean government. Each rally has its own demands.⁶⁸ In April 2010, the movement was re-named to *Bersih 2.0* as a “fully nonpartisan” movement and “free” from political influences, which is now belongs to the civil society representatives under

⁶⁶ Mohamad, Syed S. S. (2006 November 23). “*Launching of BERSIH – Gabungan untuk Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil*”. retrieved on 10 February 2018 from <https://dapmalaysia.org/english/2006/nov06/bul/bul3173.htm>

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ *The Strait Times*, (2015), “*What you need to know about Malaysia's Bersih movement*”, Retrieved January 27, 2018, from <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/what-you-need-to-know-about-malaysias-bersih-movement>

the co-chairmanship of Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan and Datuk A. Samad Said.⁶⁹ The first until third rallies have demands of free and fair on general election. Different with fourth and fifth rallies, these rallies have same demand which is the free and fair general election. However, regarding to the scandal of corruption by Prime Minister Najib Razak, *Bersih* and Malaysia civil society urged Najib Razak to step down from his position of Prime Minister.

Picture 3.1 Bersih Rally



Source: The Strait Times News

1. **Bersih 1.0**

In October 22nd 2007, the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH), a group of both politicians and civil society groups, announced a mass rally to press for electoral reform. The yellow ocean had filled Dataran Merdeka at that time. Thousand peoples wore yellow T-shirt. Then, first *Bersih* was held on 10th November 2007 in Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur in

⁶⁹ Hooi, Khoo Y. (6 May 2013), "What about Bersih?" retrieved on 10 February 2018, from https://umexpert.um.edu.my/file/publication/00011588_96725.pdf

the defiance of government ban. This rally was led by Anwar Ibrahim. This rally was followed by 50,000 participants with tight guard by the police. To avoid riots, police used water cannon and lachrymator.⁷⁰ This rally had four demands regarding immediate reforms to the electoral process:⁷¹

1. A thorough cleanup of the electoral roll;
2. The user of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting;
3. The abolition of postal voting for military and police personnel;
4. Fair access to the mass media for all parties.

In responding to this rally and its demands, the government didn't give any statement except the demand of number 2, the use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting.⁷² At the time, SPR announced the use of indelible ink in general election 12th, but four days before the election, SPR cancelled the use of indelible ink in this general election. The ink that had been distributed in the election postal was pulled back. The reason why SPR cancelled the using of indelible ink was unacceptable. SPR suspected that the process of distribution of ink had been sabotaged. This unilateral decision was strongly denied by the opposition parties. They regretted the decision because the use of indelible ink is can be avoiding of the fraud in general election.⁷³

2. Bersih 2.0

This rally called Walk for Democracy was held on 9th July 2011. The demand in this rally was familiar

⁷⁰ Andaya, Barbara W & Andaya, Leonard Y (2017), *History of Malaysia*, New York:Palgrave p.362, Retrieved on 30 January 2018 from

⁷¹ Bersih 2.0, *Bersih 1 (10 November 2007)*, Retrieved on February 18, 2018 from <http://www.bersih.org/rallies/bersih1/>

⁷² Raketkini, (2013) "*DILEMA - Apa itu Bersih?*" retrieved on 14 February 2018 from <https://www.roketkini.com/2012/05/10/dilema-apa-itu-bersih/>

⁷³ Pathmawathy, S. (2011), "*Alasan SPR batal dakwat kekal tak meyakinkan*" Retrieved on February 20 2018, from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/174664>

to the previous rally to press for electoral reform. This rally was led by Anwar Ibrahim (leader of opposition) and joined by the coalition of 62 non-governmental organizations shouting for free and fair elections. At the time, Bersih was lead by Dato' Ambiga Sreenevasan. On the 8th July 2011, Malaysian Police released the list of 91 people to forbid them entering Kuala Lumpur, including the rally organisers. Eventually, in the day of Bersih 2.0 on 9th July 2011, 50.000 people successfully entered Dataran Merdeka on Kuala Lumpur. In the mess situation, the police is fired the lachrymator and water canon into the hospital in Kuala Lumpur, Tung Shin Hospital and the protesters were hiding on small areas. Furthermore, the situation was not conducive, Human Right Watch called police to secure Kuala Lumpur. In fact, Kuala Lumpur was become a mess, 1670 protesters were arrested and police attacked protesters for unacceptable reasons.⁷⁴

This rally has shouted 8 demands to the government that the government should:⁷⁵

1. Clean the electoral roll
2. Reform postal ballot
3. Use indelible ink
4. Implemented Minimum 21 days campaign period
5. Give Free and fair access to media
6. Strengthen public institutions
7. Stop corruption
8. Stop dirty politics

The protest of *Bersih 2.0* was also followed by Malaysian overseas population spread over 38 locations in the world, such as: Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Hobart,

⁷⁴ Mallot, John R. (2011) "*Malaysia's Political Awakening: A Call for US Leadership*", Asia Pacific Bulletin, retrieved on February 2 2018, from <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/131375/APB124.pdf>

⁷⁵ Bersih 2.0, *Bersih 1 (10 November 2007)*, Retrieved on 2 February 2018 from <http://www.bersih.org/rallies/bersih1/>

Melbourne, Adelaide, Osaka, Seoul, Suzhou, Taipei, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Perth, Singapore Online, Singapore Picnic, Dubai, Cairo, Istanbul, Stockholm, Graz, Austria, Zurich, Geneva, Paris, London, Glasgow, Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, New York City, Ottawa, Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, and San Francisco. 4.003 people joined the rally.⁷⁶ This overseas rally was also called Global Bersih.

Although the action of 709 (Bersih 2.0 on July 9, 2011 was also called action 709) was filled with riots, It has not given the desired results. However, in this action proved that the power of civil society not only attracts national attention, but also international attention globally. Just as its rally before, this rally has no result in electoral reform. It was due to its very strong power from the Malaysian government to reject the wishes of its people.

3. Bersih 3.0

Sit In or Duduk Bersih is the name of Bersih 3.0 rally. This rally occurred on April 28th 2012 as the follow up of the previous rally in 2011. On the day before the rally, *Bersih 2.0* and protesters planned to meet from six points and gathered in the meet point of Dataran Merdeka Kuala Lumpur. The rally of *Duduk Bantah* was interesting. This rally has grown beyond Malaysia in 80 cities abroad as the solidarity of Malaysian people that lived abroad. *Bersih* estimated that this rally was joined by 250.000 peoples and mentioned that *Bersih 3.0* rally is the massive rally in recent years.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Global Bersih. (16 April 2012) "*Global Bersih 2.0 – The Awakening of the Malaysian Diaspora*" retrieved on 17 February 2018 from <https://www.globalbersih.org/2012/04/16/global-bersih-2-0-the-awakening-of-the-malaysian-diaspora/>

⁷⁷ Yee, Choong P. (10 May 2012) "*Malaysia's Bersih 3.0: Sentiments, Perceptions and Politics*" RSIS Commentaries,

Like previous rallies, Bersih 3.0 rally has demand:

1. The Election Commission must resign, as it has failed in its responsibility and has lost the confidence of the public.
2. The electoral process must be cleaned before the 13th General Elections.
3. Invite international observers to observe the 13th General Elections.

At the first, this rally was run peacefully on several hours. But after 2 PM, small group appeared and tried to breach the police barriers. Since that, this rally was runs chaos. The most violent rally ever at that time. The Police launched the lachrymator and water canon into the protesters. As the statement by police that 222 people were arrested. The police of Malaysia told untruth on the media that the protesters on the rally were only around 25.000 people. But the witness said the truth. They said that the participants were more than 100.000 people around Kuala Lumpur⁷⁸. Ambiga regreted that has done is excessive in the use of water cannon and lachrymator by the police.

If we see from the number of participants of *Bersih 3.0* which increased from the previous rallies, *Global Bersih* as the provider of *Bersih 3.0* rallies overseas was successfully held in 35 countries of 85 locations. *Global Bersih* is an alliance between *Bersih 2.0* in Malaysia through Malaysian people overseas.

4. Bersih 4.0

The fraud that occurred on the 13th general election made *Bersih 2.0* held another rally to deliver their demands about free and fair election. The 13th the general election was coloured by fraud. One of the frauds was about the foreign voters and ghost voters.

⁷⁸ Ayse Alibeyoglu, “Police violence marks Malaysia reform rally”, (29 April 2012) retrieved on 20 February 2018, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2012/04/20124286221449574.html>

Foreign voters are voters who came from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines and others. It peoples who work in Malaysia are given Malaysian Identity Card has rights to join general election. But many of them are from Bangladesh.

This rally was held on 29 and 30 August 2015 in 3 cities in Malaysia such as Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. *Bersih 4.0* rally is held one day before Malaysian Independence Day. As the reported by media, this rally was joined by around 300.000 participants in 3 cities.⁷⁹ Not only that, the participants also came from overseas. 500.000 people from 65 cities joined the rally peacefully. Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, Kucing and 65 cities were flooded by yellow T-shirt as their dress code.

In addition, *Bersih 4.0* rally happened because the disappointment of the Malaysian citizen because of the corruption committed by the Prime Minister Najib Razak. As reported by Wall Street Journal, Najib Razak was doing corruption of around \$ 700 Million USD or this case was called 1MDB scandal.⁸⁰ Moreover, Prime Minister Najib Razak denied this scandal. He did every way to secure his position as Prime Minister and made this issue disappeared. *Bersih 4.0* that occurred two days was different from the previous rallies. The main goal on this rally was to demand the resignation or step down of Najib Razak as Prime Minister. The protestors mentioned their simple demands on this rally such as Clean elections, Clean government, The right to dissent, Protect parliamentary democracy and Save the economy.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ayuningtyas, Rita. "5 Fakta tentang Gerakan Bersih 4 Malaysia" (30 August 2015) retrieved on 22 February 2018 from <http://global.liputan6.com/read/2305419/5-fakta-tentang-gerakan-bersih-4-malaysia>

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Bersih 2.0, *Bersih 4* (2015 August 29-30), Retrieved on 22 February 2018 from <http://www.bersih.org/rallies/bersih4/>

The unexpected thing in this rally was the emergence of former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. Before this, Mahathir had proposed Najib Razak to step down as the Prime Minister because of mismanaging of country's finance. Najib Razak also accused that Mahathir was conspiring with foreigners to bring down his government. Keith Leong from Keith Reimagines ASEAN (KRA Group) said that the appearance of Mahathir on this rally was boosting for *Bersih 2.0* to strength their power. In the end, Mahathir left the rally and didn't give statement to the media.⁸²

Beside the rally in 29 and 30 August, another rally occurred two weeks after *Bersih 4.0* rally. The year when Malaysian day on 1963, a march was occurred. Malaysian Day is commemorating on 1963 East Malaysia or Sabah and Sarawak joined as Malaya. Group of pro-government or UMNO sympathizer held a march in Kuala Lumpur to show their supports towards the government and UMNO. This group was called "Red Shirt", because the on the rally they wore red T-shirt. In the rally organizer of this march was Jamal Yunos from UMNO. He said that this march called for respect of Malay ethnic.⁸³ This rally was joined by around 30.000 people that were mostly from Malay ethnic support Najib Razak who is battling on the 1MDB scandal. They were denying ethnic Chinese community and opposition party leaders.

5. Bersih 5.0

One day before *Bersih 5.0* rally, chairman of Bersih 2.0 Maria Chin Abdullah and secretariat member

⁸² Naidu, Sumisha. & Goh, Melisa "Thousands take to streets of Kuala Lumpur for *Bersih 4.0*" retrieved on 22 February 2018 from <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/thousands-take-to-streets-of-kuala-lumpur-for-bersih-4-0-8251744>

⁸³ BBC News. (16 September 2015) "*Malaysia government supporters march in Kuala Lumpur*" retrieved on 22 February 2018 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34265790>

of *Bersih 2.0* Mandeep Singh were arrested by the police in detention under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 for 10 days.⁸⁴ Peaceful democratic with tagline “Combine our energy – New Malaysia” occurred on 19 November 2016 in Kuala Lumpur. On this day, protesters from *Bersih 2.0* wore yellow shirts as the numbers of around 15,500 people demanding for the resignation of Najib Razak because of 1MDB scandal. Besides, they also demand for a clear message that they wanted a change, a clean administration and free and fair elections.⁸⁵

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad also attended this rally for the second time as his first rally was in *Bersih 4.0*. He led this campaign for clean government and step down of Najib Razak.⁸⁶ Not only former Prime Minister of Malaysia who supported this rally. Non-governmental Organizations such Amnesty International and Human Right Watch also regreted because of what the police did. The police arrested *Bersih 2.0* activists. In the other hand, protesters also demanded to free the activists of *Bersih 2.0* from the jail. After 11 days, Maria Chin Abdullah was free from the jail.

6. Global Bersih

As the output from *Bersih 2.0*, it made international networking overseas call *Global Bersih*. *Global Bersih* is non-profit organization as the place to support Malaysian citizen to realize the clean government, free and fair of elections in Malaysia from overseas. *Global Bersih* provides a global platform for

⁸⁴ Front Line Defenders, “Status : Case Closed” , retrieved on 23 February 2018 from <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-maria-chin-abdullah>

⁸⁵ Naidu, Sumisha. & Goh, Melisa. “More than 15,000 turn up for *Bersih 5* rally in KL”

retrieved on 22 February 2018 from

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/more-than-15-000-turn-up-for-bersih-5-rally-in-kl-7712642>

⁸⁶ Ibid

the voices and stories of Malaysians civil society to reach out to the international community, particularly international human rights bodies, diplomatic missions, foreign media and civil society.⁸⁷ Based on the Global Bersih secretariat on Geneva, Global Bersih has international delegates representing Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, London, Geneva, Paris, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, Auckland, Melbourne and Sydney.

⁸⁷ Global Bersih, "Who We Are", Retrieved on 23 February 2018 from <https://www.globalbersih.org/about/who-are-we/>