

Media Release

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Persecuted Malaysian satirist to tour Australia

Malaysia's best-known satirist Zunar tours five Australian capital cities in June, where he will be drawing, discussing and performing art, censorship, and Malaysian politics and its billion-dollar corruption crisis.

Zulkiflee Anwar Haque, better known as Zunar, is a multi award-winning cartoonist who has been entertaining and informing Malaysians about their world for over 20 years.

Currently facing 43 years in prison for alleged 'sedition' over his outspoken criticism - through satire and cartoons - of Malaysia's Najib government, his books are banned in Malaysia for allegedly containing content "detrimental to public order", and the Malaysian police have confiscated thousands of copies.

SABM Australia President, Mr. Praveen Nagappan said that Zunar had struck a chord with ordinary people.

"His ability to view topical issues through humour has endeared him to the public. Australians & Malaysians should stand up and support Zunar in this time of crisis." said Mr. Nagappan.

Like a classic court jester, Zunar shines a light revealing the naked truth about Malaysia's rulers and the nation's endangered condition, in his art-form that's full of humour and flair.

"For asking people to laugh at the Malaysian government, I was handcuffed, detained, thrown into the lock up," said Zunar. "But I kept laughing and encouraging people to laugh with me. Why? Because laughter is the best form of protest. My mission is to fight through cartoon," added Zunar.

"Why pinch when you can punch? People need to know the truth and I will continue to fight through my cartoons. I want to give a clear message to the aggressors—they can ban my cartoons, they can ban my books, but they cannot ban my mind," Zunar said in New York, when he accepted the 2015 Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Zunar's fight for the freedom of expression in Malaysia has also been lauded with the Hellman-Hammett 2015 award from Human Rights Watch, and most recently in Geneva, with the Cartooning for Peace Award 2016 and a public installation of his work along Lake Geneva, launched by the city's mayor, and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning American cartoonist Matt Wuerker praises Zunar's "power and effectiveness" in exposing the Malaysian government, and condemns Zunar's persecution: "It's entirely too common the response to cartoons and satire in so many parts of the world today. In some sense, it's a compliment to irascible cartoonists like Zunar. It just demonstrates the power and effectiveness their work," Wuerker said.

In his first Australian tour of Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth, Zunar hopes to celebrate and reinforce the deep and long-standing ties between Australians and Malaysians, who cherish the freedoms and democratic rights we take for granted in Australia.

The tour is co-organised by Malaysian community groups in the five cities and GlobalBersih, the Malaysian democratisation movement abroad. Several of the events include public discussions with Australian media, civil society and political leaders, and Zunar's latest (banned) books will be available for sale and autographs. Zunar will be in Melbourne from 10 June 2016 to 11 June 2016. SABM Australia has organised two FREE events with Zunar in Melbourne during this time. Refer to details below.

1. Sembang-sembang and Doodle with Zunar

Date: 6.15 to 8.30pm on Friday 10 June 2016

Venue: Blue Room Melbourne Multicultural Hub
506 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, 3000

2. Public Seminar on Sedition and the Cost of Democracy *(together with senior academicians from Melbourne Law School)*

Date: 2.30pm to 5pm on Saturday 11 June 2016

Venue: Law-G08, Melbourne Law School
185 Pelham Street, Carlton

****Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia in Australia (SABM Australia) is a group of like-minded individuals of Malaysian origin based in Australia who advocate for enhanced governance in Malaysia.***

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