

## Authorities asked to release 15,000 seized Bibles

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(The Star) - The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) has called for the immediate release of the 15,000 Bahasa Malaysia Bibles being withheld by the authorities.

It said the seizure contravened Article 11 of the Federal Constitution which gives all Malaysians the right to profess and practise his faith.

"This constitutional right is rendered illusory if Christians in Malaysia are denied access to Bibles in a language with which they are familiar," said its chairman Bishop Ng Moon Hing and executive committee in a statement Wednesday.

They said withholding the Bibles deprived Christians in Sabah, Sarawak and in the peninsula, a large majority of whom use Bahasa Malaysia, "the right to use the Holy Scriptures in Bahasa Malaysia, to practise and profess their faith and to nourish themselves spiritually."

They said it was baseless to withhold the Bibles on the ground that they were prejudicial to public order since they had been in existence before independence and had never caused public disorder.

"Since the 1970s and in consonance with the Government's policies in education and the national language, Christians in Malaysia have received their education in Bahasa Malaysia.

"To deny the same Christians the right to read and study the Bible in Bahasa Malaysia is thus ridiculous and offensive. In fact, it is this action by the authorities themselves which is an affront to good public order.

"We call on the relevant government officials who have neither the authority nor the right to act in this unconscionable manner to explain their action to the church leaders and to the public," they said, adding that churches stood to their commitment to Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.

They said the Government had in an agreement in 2005 stated Bahasa Malaysia Bibles could be distributed so long as the symbol of the cross and the words "A Christian publication" were printed on the front page.

They called on the Government to walk the talk of its 1Malaysia policy and not impose conditions on the freedom of citizens to worship, pray and read the Holy Scriptures in Bahasa Malaysia. "How can the first pillar of the Rukunegara, that is, 'Belief In God,' be made a living reality if the Government imposes restrictions and conditions on the constitutional and fundamental right of citizens to freedom of religion?" they said.