

## ARE WE MISSING THE POINT?, 16 OCT 2002

The Women's Centre for Change (formerly Women's Crisis Centre), Penang is concerned by the recent statements made by both our Prime Minister and our Foreign Minister (The Sun 15/10/2002 , NST 16/10/02) asking for an apology from the Philippine government. WCC feels that this sidesteps the issues of an alleged custodial rape and subsequent deportation of a 13-year old Malaysian child.

Clearly the issue at hand is alleged custodial rape and not nationality. Irrespective of whether the child is a Malaysian or Filipina, a rape of a minor has allegedly taken place in a detention center. This is an extremely serious allegation which warrants immediate investigation. If this allegation is found to be true, then the perpetrator(s) must be brought to justice. The behavior of police personnel and guards in police lock-ups and detention centers must be subject to scrutiny in light of recent incidents.

Secondly, it is also of grave concern that a Malaysian child was detained and deported. This is in direct contravention of several articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (to which the Malaysian government is a signatory). We are deeply concerned with the welfare of this deported child.

Instead of focusing on obtaining an apology from the Philippine government, the relevant authorities should investigate and demand answers to – alleged custodial rape, wrongful detention, and wrongful deportation.

It is high time our authorities find the courage to take responsibility and act accordingly.