

CANING IS NOT THE SOLUTION, 29 NOV 2007

The Women's Centre for Change Penang (WCC) notes with great concern the recent proposal to extend caning as a method to handle discipline problems involving schoolgirls. WCC cautions against the use of the cane on children be they boys or girls, and highlights the following points:

1. The caning of a child is in direct contravention of the Convention on the Rights of The Child (CRC), of which Malaysia is a signatory. Article 19(1) of the CRC obliges states parties to take all appropriate legislative administrative, social and education measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardians or any other person who has the care of the child. The Malaysian government as a state party to the CRC has an obligation to uphold this international convention and protect the rights of the child.
2. Caning may not be the most effective way to deal with problems of indiscipline. While caning may bring about the immediate compliance of the child, the issues of physical harm as well as emotional damage to the child need to be taken into consideration. Corporal punishment can lead to increased antisocial behaviour, aggression and chronic defiance.
3. The use of the cane can be abused especially when frustrations are vented.
4. The social consequence of caning is that it sends a clear message that violence is an acceptable form of behaviour in society i.e., it is alright to use violence and inflict pain to teach a child something. This goes against all efforts to reduce the level of violence in our society.

Having said this, the problem of indiscipline in schools and the frustrations of school authorities must to be acknowledged and addressed. Caning may seem to be a quick fix solution to misbehaviour but it fails to address the root causes of the problem i.e., an inability to fit into a rigid, exam orientated education system, poverty related issues, the need to challenge boundaries, insufficient guidance from the home, dysfunctional family situations, negative influences from the neighborhood environment and so on. Addressing the root causes of the problem would require expertise and resources not just from the school authorities but also from the Ministry of Education and other parties.

WCC would therefore urge the Ministry of Education to:

1. **Work with other agencies and community groups** for example those dealing with the health, welfare and rights of the child, so as to provide support where needed, to both students and school authorities;
2. **Consult with experts** in the field to work out alternative forms of discipline which include behaviour modification programmes that help enhance positive behaviour of students.
3. **Support school teachers** by reducing the number of students per class, having teaching assistants, providing skills training on class control and handling difficult students, having access to highly trained counselors and child psychologists; and
4. **Have a more balanced education system** which moves away from an over emphasis on exams towards a more holistic education which cultivates the child's other potentials.

WCC hopes that all parties will consider the best interests of the child when handling disciplinary problems in school.

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