

INTEGRATION NOT SEGREGATION, 24 DEC 2008

The Women's Centre for Change (WCC) Penang is greatly disturbed by the recent position taken in relation to I-Dance street dancing competition in Penang.

State Pas youth chief Mohamed Hafiz Mohd Nordin has been quoted as saying that "element like shuffle dancing.... can lead to social ills amongst youngsters."

The response by the state government, as conveyed by the Penang state youth and sport committee chairman YB Lydia Ong Kok Fook has been to impose the condition that Muslim male and female participants are not allowed to mingle with each other during the competition.

It is sad and ironic that an activity such as street dancing, which has tremendous capacity to unite young people from diverse backgrounds and encourage interaction which can only enhance multi racial and multi cultural unity should now be demonised as a potential source of social ill.

What is also disconcerting is the state government's decision to segregate participants on the grounds of gender and religion. This move is an apparent compromise in relation to Pas's earlier demands that no Muslim participant be allowed in the competition.

In a multicultural society, the characteristics of diversity must be promoted and valued as the strength of the society. The I-Dance is a healthy competition for youths of all races and walks and is in fact supported by the State Youth and Sports Committee. On the basis of equality for all races, WCC calls for integration and not segregation. We cannot afford to segregate the youths based on gender as we move towards developing a human capital with first class mentality.

Women's Centre for Change Penang