

JAG DEMANDS PUBLIC APOLOGY FROM MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, 15 MAY 2007

JAG Demands Public Apology from Members of Parliament END ALL SEXISM AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN PARLIAMENT 15 MAY 2007

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) is outraged by the sexist behaviour of certain Members of Parliament (MPs). We condemn the sexist remarks made by Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) and Datuk Mohd Said Yusuf (BN-Jasin). These remarks are not only extremely offensive to the particular female MP they were directed at. In referring to a natural, biological function of the female body, those remarks were discriminatory against women generally, and were extremely offensive against that particular female MP.

To recapitulate, Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) had made the following remark when debating about a roof leak in Parliament:

“Where is the leak, the member for Batu Gajah also leaks once a month.”

His remark was supported by Datuk Mohd Said Yusuf (BN-Jasin).

JAG demands an immediate public apology from the said MPs, Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) and Datuk Mohd Said Yusuf (BN-Jasin). They must also apologise to their fellow MPs in Parliament for their misbehaviour and should be disciplined by Parliament.

In subsequent press interviews, the matter was further belittled and diminished by other MPs, such as YB Datuk Idris Haron (BN-Tangga Batu) and YB Dato Nazri.

As members of the Gender and Human Rights Caucus respectively, their statements are even more worrying as they displayed a clear lack of understanding of gender equality and non-discrimination, two fundamental principles of human rights. The damage was compounded by the Speaker's dismissal of a disciplinary action against the MPs in question based on a technicality in the Standing Orders (“Sexist MPs at work again”, The Sun, 11/05/07).

Such insensitive comments made against a woman MP reflect an underlying, deeply entrenched culture within Parliament of sexism and gender discrimination. JAG is concerned whether MPs who make such comments can truly be said to represent the interests of their constituency if they persist in this fashion.

Malaysian citizens must also be reminded that this recent incident is not isolated. In 2002, JAG has protested to Parliament by way of a Memorandum submitted to the Deputy Speaker which highlighted examples of sexism in Parliament including the following:-

1. A woman MP was told not to be too emotional in a debate on the Immigrations Act 1963 and the Income Tax Act 1967 and the issues she raised were dismissed as being non-discriminatory (DR. 24.10.2000).

2. In a debate to legislate against sexual harassment, a male MP had commented that in order to prevent sexual harassment, all women should be fully covered (“tutup aurat”) irrespective of their religion. Women were told to cover themselves completely for the good of everyone. (DR. 13.3.2000).

3. A male MP had made the following patronising and belittling remarks against a young female MP (DR. 11.12.2001) :

“I would like to advise my younger sister....learn from this mistake... (Pg.34)” “... Batu Gajah (MP) is a new representative, young, I’ve even called her my child as she’s the same age as my daughter...” (Pg. 104) “...Batu Gajah (MP) would like to be the new Saint Joan of Arc (political martyr)...(Pg. 105)”

4. A male MP had addressed a female MP with lewd and patronising language, presumably to humiliate her, by calling her a little girl and asked her to go home to “suck on a pacifier”. (DR. 29.3.2000).

Malaysia, being a signatory of the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), has an international obligation to uphold gender equality and non-discrimination. At the same time, under Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitution, we have made a commitment at the national level to prohibit discrimination against persons on the basis of gender. Such commitment is critically weakened and continually undermined by MPs who lack basic respect, knowledge and understanding on gender issues.

JAG applauds the statements made by YB Tan Lian Hoe (BN-Bukit Gantang), YB Zaid Ibrahim (BN-Kota Baru), YB Ng Yen Yen and also YB Dato Sri Shahrizat in taking to task the sexism and gender discrimination displayed by their fellow MPs. However, it is discouraging to note that theirs are but a few voices. JAG is also disappointed to note that other women and men MPs, including a woman Parliamentary Secretary, who were present when the motion was tabled for disciplinary action against the MPs, have failed to rise to the occasion to show solidarity and to denounce sexism. We need more MPs, women and men, to voice their protest and to end sexism and discrimination in Parliament.

JAG demands that the Prime Minister, also the Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Gender Equality, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the Parliamentary Gender Caucus take immediate action to end all forms of sexism and discrimination in Parliament. JAG demands that any Member of Parliament who continues to ill-behave in Parliament should be suspended for a period of six months and his pay and allowances cut until his suspension is over. Malaysians deserve better quality representatives in Parliament.

Signed by

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Women's Development Collective

For and on behalf of the

Joint Action Group for Gender Equality

Women's Development Collective

All Women's Action Society

Women's Aid Organisation

Sisters In Islam

Women's Centre for Change

Malaysian Trade Union Congress – Women's Committee