

JOINT ACTION GROUP CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST SEXIST MPS, 20 JUL 2007

Press Statement by the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG)

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) has been monitoring the debates in Parliament since the late 1990s. We note with great concern that sexist and derogatory remarks about women continue to be uttered regularly during debates. To date, no sanctions have been taken against the errant Members of Parliament (MPs) who have made such remarks.

On 2nd July 2007, JAG met with Y.B. Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Bin Abdul Aziz, the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Caucus on Human Rights to voice our concerns over the impunity with which MPs can make the sexist and derogatory remarks in Parliament. JAG believes that the MPs continue to make such remarks because no sanctions were levied against them. Following that fruitful discussion, we met with Y.A.B Tan Sri Dato' Seri DiRaja Ramli Bin Ngah Talib, the Speaker of the House of Representatives on 19th July 2007.

JAG suggested to both YB Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Bin Abdul Aziz and YAB Tan Sri Dato' Seri DiRaja Ramli Bin Ngah Talib that concrete sanctions be enforced against errant MPs, and positive steps taken to foster gender sensitivity amongst MPs, as follows :

1. amend Section 36(6)(b) of the Standing Orders to read :
“no member shall impute sexist and abusive remarks and/or behaviour to any other member, failing which MPs shall be suspended for six months without pay and allowances.”; and
2. conduct gender awareness training regularly so that MPs become conscious of their behaviour and may therefore refrain from making sexist and derogatory remarks about women. This may also enable MPs to look at the laws that they pass with more gender sensitivity.

While JAG truly appreciates and continues to support the efforts of some MPs who have spoken well on issues of gender equality and non-discrimination, we strongly urge political parties not to field candidates in the coming elections who have made sexist and derogatory remarks about women. Such MPs are a disgrace and they lower the tone of the august Houses of Parliament. They also reflect poorly on the political parties to which they belong.

JAG urges that political parties field more women candidates in seats where they stand a good chance of winning. This is in line with the aims articulated in the Ninth Malaysia Plan to increase the number of women in decision making processes to at least 30%.

The actions being urged by JAG reflect the United Nations theme of International Women's Day 2007 : 'Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls'. MPs must realize that their bad behaviour cannot be tolerated, and they will be sanctioned if they utter sexist and derogatory remarks against women.

JAG notes with regret that our efforts to meet with the Parliamentary Gender Caucus on this issue have come to naught. We are very disappointed that a body which was set up to look into issues of gender equality and discrimination has not been proactive at all in raising the awareness of MPs on gender. Furthermore, the Gender Caucus has not been in the forefront in calling for stern actions to be taken against MPs uttering sexist remarks.

Finally, JAG is disappointed that in our efforts to address the press in Parliament on 19th July 2007 after meeting the Speaker, there was initially an attempt to stop us from doing so. Only after discussion with the relevant authority were we allowed to meet the press corps. JAG reiterates that the Houses of Parliament are public spaces where Malaysians must be able to visit without prior appointments. They must be able to speak with the elected representatives if they wish, and access to the press corps must not be restricted.

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All Women's Action Society (AWAM)

for and on behalf of the Joint Action Group on Gender Equality (JAG) comprising:

1. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
2. Malaysian Trade Union Congress – Women's Committee (MTUC)
3. Sisters In Islam (SIS)
4. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
5. Women's Centre for Change, Penang (WCC)
6. Women's Development Collective (WDC)