

## NAJIB'S REMARK AT ODDS WITH POST OF WOMEN'S MINISTER, 2 JUL 2012

The prime minister's response to an MP in Parliament last Monday was "degrading" and at odds with his position as women, family and community development minister, said a coalition of women's rights NGOs.

The Joint Action Group for Gender Inequality (JAG) was referring to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's response to a supplementary question by Ampang MP Zuraida Kamaruddin, where he defended his takeover of the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

The PKR parliamentarian had argued that Najib's other positions would keep him too busy to properly run the ministry, adding that several policy matters on women's development remain unresolved.

"YB, you don't exemplify the polite behaviour of a woman. Her (Zuraida) mouth is quite formidable," he had said before laughing.

JAG condemned the premier's remarks as promoting "archaic views", especially considering Zuraida's question concerned various women's welfare issues.

"Such comments by the prime minister, who is also the women's minister, are unbecoming to his office," said the group in a press release today.

The group also expressed alarm at the suspension of NTV7 news anchor Ras Adiba Mohd Radzi after she cropped her hair in support of a National Cancer Council (Makna) event.

"Instead of recognising the presenter's skills, experience and active role for a worthy cause, the station focused on the superficial issue of hair length," it said, accusing NTV7 of perpetuating female gender stereotypes.

They were also "disturbed" about anonymous calls allegedly made from a religious department to Ras Adiba which referred to a fatwa prohibiting women from shaving their heads.

The incident is reminiscent of the National Fatwa Council's fatwa against "tomboys", recalled JAG.

Politicians and the media should instead address issues surrounding women's welfare, rather than pushing outdated ideas on women's behaviour, they charged.

"The disturbing message is that women who do not look or behave according to a narrow prescribed definition of 'femininity' will face sanctions.

“Instead of promoting archaic views on how women should dress and behave, the media and policymakers should highlight and address the pressing issues that affect women’s lives,” it said.