

NEED FOR BROAD SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAW, 2 MAR 2009

The Women's Centre for Change (WCC), Penang welcomes the move by the government to introduce legislation on sexual harassment. At a recent seminar the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry announced that they were currently in discussion with the Human Resources Ministry about the proposed law on sexual harassment (SUN 23/2/09).

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) led by WCC has held numerous dialogues, issued memoranda and in 2001, submitted a proposed Sexual Harassment Bill to the government. We strongly recommend that the current discussions between both ministries take into consideration the crucial need for a separate, comprehensive piece of legislation on sexual harassment and not merely an amendment to the Employment Act which does not cover many categories of workers among other things. The existing guidelines, i.e., the Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment, introduced in 1999 by the Human Resources Ministry, has not been particularly effective as it has not been made mandatory.

WCC urges both Ministries to ensure that the proposed law has a broad definition of employees, an in-house dispute resolution mechanism, as well as, an independent, external mechanism to act as a check and balance for sexual harassment complaints. In addition to the law it is crucial that an awareness campaign be conducted so that people are made aware of their rights, including the right to redress, and the mechanisms to use for redress when sexual harassment takes place.

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25th Feb 2009