



## **STATUTORY RAPE IS NOT A RACIAL ISSUE**

Yesterday, on 18 March 2014, the Deputy Home Minister Wan Junaidi Wan Jaafar made a statement to the House of Parliament, claiming that Malays are “more sensitive” to minors being the victims of statutory rape, as opposed to other races, who are “more inclined to accept statutory rape and are therefore less inclined to lodge police reports.” Malaysia is currently enduring instances of ethnic tension, and such statements will only make matters worse.

As organisations working on women’s rights, we stand together with women and men all over Malaysia in reiterating that rape, in particular statutory rape, is not and has never been “acceptable” by any race in this country, or anywhere for that matter. Rape is an issue that cuts across all races, and this must be recognised particularly in a multicultural country like ours..

Statutory rape is legally defined as sexual intercourse with a girl below 16, with or without her consent. Many factors impact upon the rate of reporting of both rape and statutory rape.

The reality is that the majority of sexual assaults remain unreported.

Many victims do not report the rape because they are afraid of the consequences. They are often blamed for the rape, and some women are forced to marry their rapist to avoid “shame” to the family. This is especially alarming in the instances of statutory rape leading to child marriages.

An underlying issue is that many women do not know their rights under the law, and worse still when they report they are disbelieved! The trauma they have to endure while going through the trial is enough to inhibit them from making a police report.

The imbalance in the composition of the police force may also prevent certain groups from making a police report following an incident of sexual assault. As far back as 2004, the then Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Mohd Bakri Omar understood this and explained that *“A multi-ethnic society like Malaysia must also be reflected in the ethnic composition of the police force[...] the bulk of the rank and file personnel are indeed bumiputera and they are the ones who interact with the public on a day-to-day basis [...] Being dominated by a single ethnic group hampers our interaction with a multi-ethnic Malaysian public..”*<sup>1</sup>

At best, the statement of the Deputy Home Minister lacks understanding of the complexity of the issues that surround the reporting of rape and statutory rape. At worst, the remarks are prejudiced and is culturally insensitive to the sensibilities of all reasonable and fair-minded Malaysians, whether Malay-Muslims or otherwise.

We call on the Deputy Home Minister to apologise publicly for his remarks, and for all our leaders and policymakers to stop making unnecessary statements, whether in speculation or otherwise, which are unfounded and unfairly divisive. We need our leaders to focus instead on solving the rising rates of violent sexual crimes.

**Loh Cheng Kooi, Executive Director, Women’s Centre for Change, Penang (WCC)  
19 March 2014 - Penang, Malaysia**

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<sup>1</sup> Keynote address by the Honourable Inspector-General of Police, YDH Tan Sri Mohd. Bakri Bin Hj. Omar in conjunction with the official opening of the Seminar on “Industrial Security Issues: A Business Solutions Approach” on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2004, Gurney Hotel, Penang