

Sexism is not a Malaysian Culture

Media Statement, 15 July 2014

Sexism is not a Malaysian Culture

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) is extremely shocked by yet another slammer on women's human rights. UMNO lawyer, Datuk Mohd Hafarizam Harun has actually given a sexist, distasteful and disrespectful comment against PKR president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to say that she should be barred from being the Selangor Menteri Besar post due to her menstrual period. Yet again women are being discriminated due to their biological make up besides relegating women as being secondary to men.

The point here is not whether eventually Wan Azizah agrees or even become a candidate for the Menteri Besar post or even become one. She should not be discriminated against based on her biological make up. She, like any other female or male, should be given the equal opportunity to present herself as the candidate as nowhere in the Selangor constitution nor Federal Constitution, is it stated that no woman or female is prevented from being a menteri besar.

His misogynistic comment extends to dehumanising Dr. Wan Azizah as being "unclean", not able to it together with the Sultan, and not being able to pray and read Quran, among others, just because she is a woman and with menses. Even worse, his statement was concurred by Dr Shamrahayu Abdul Aziz, a lecturer from UIA who further added fuel to the sexism by saying that perhaps Selangor is not ready for a female Menteri Besar.

Making such misogynistic comments reflects sexist prejudices and a patriarchal ideology which form the basis for discrimination against females in our society. We would have thought that in this millennium with women leaders and politicians in our midst we would have moved towards a more inclusive, responsive and non-discriminatory society. The fact that Malaysia has made the bold step to amend our constitution to end gender discrimination and we have also signed the Convention against all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) means that discriminatory and sexist practices, words, attitudes and thinking are outlaw in our society.

EMPOWER demands that both Hafarizam and Shamrahayu retract their statements and to apologise immediately. Their sexist behaviour is not the Malaysian culture. It is also not for them to decide who will be the next menteri besar – it is for the people of Selangor to decide. If people in Selangor are not happy with the selection, they can demand for a new one but it will not be based on biological make-up, sexism and discriminatory criteria but based on principles, merits, effectiveness, and responsiveness towards voters' interests.

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