

# Sexism and Bigotry in Parliament Must Be Censured

**Sexism and Bigotry in Parliament Must Be Censured  
Media Statement, 5 November 2015**

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) is appalled to read reports that the Member of Parliament for Baling, Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim, had used the slur “pondan” against a female Parliamentarian during a debate and further compounded his offence the next day by calling another Parliamentarian an “apek” and telling him to “balik tongsan.” We are further outraged that the Speaker did not censure him for the use of these derogatory terms, merely that he should retract the use of “balik tongsan.”

Even more outrageous is the fact that the MP for Baling uttered the word “pondan” against Kasthuri Patto, the MP for Batu Kawan, when she refused to let him interrupt her speech on the deaths of the five Orang Asli children in Gua Musang. She was bringing up concerns over the quality of education available to Orang Asli communities and their children and asking for accountability on the part of government agencies tasked with their care and empowerment. Do these issues matter so little that a Parliamentarian saw fit to interrupt her speech and use a slur against her?

We note that Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim is a repeat offender. He was the same MP who said in April that non-Muslim women should not be invited to mosques because they “mungkin bocor” (ie., might be menstruating), in response to the MP for Kulai being invited to a function in a surau. These uncouth remarks are unbecoming of not only his office as a Parliamentarian, but also as the Chairperson of Lembaga Tabung Haji’s Board of Directors.

That the MP for Baling appears to enjoy the absence of any possible reprimand reflect a political scenario where sexist, homophobic and transphobic words are freely used against perceived opponents, and where ethnic minorities are demonised or summarily ignored as unimportant. His impunity also reflects a country where women make up only 10.4 percent of the 222 Parliamentarians, and face multiple layers of discrimination in even being nominated as election candidates.

Despite scoring fairly high for the United Nations composite Human Development Index in 2013, with a value of 0.773 and a global rank of 62nd, Malaysia scored only a paltry 0.21 on the gender index (with a score of 1 indicating absolute gender equality) – among the lowest in the Asia Pacific region. In other words, despite having the appearance of a newly-developed nation, Malaysia has a long way to go in terms of ensuring equality for women. Or, for that matter, communities at the very margins of its development policies.

As an immediate measure, EMPOWER calls on the Speaker and for Barisan Nasional to censure the MP for Baling over his un-Parliamentarian, derogatory remarks. As part of a broader approach, we further call for a Parliamentary review of the standing orders to prohibit sexist, racist, and bigoted remarks.

We remind the government that the United Nations has raised gender equality as a priority issue, including it as a stand-alone goal in the new Sustainable Development Goals. The Malaysian government has repeatedly pledged its commitment at national, regional, and international levels. Unfortunately, while the Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak makes a meal out of the Malaysian government's moderation and empowerment of women in international fora, this is undermined at home by a member of his own party.

Janarthani Arumugam

President

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)