



COMMUNITY CENTRES FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDIAN WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

TRANSLATION OF MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED
TO THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT JUNE 2004

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Introduction

Malaysians went to the polls for the 11th General Election on the 21 March 2004. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was given a resounding victory despite this being his maiden election as the prime minister of the nation.

The ruling coalition won 198 parliamentary seat and 452 state legislative assembly seats. Opposition did not have a good showing, managing only 20 parliamentary seats and 53 state seats.

Campaigns did not see any major issues being highlighted apart from usual, role of Islam in the government, corruption, privatization, uplifting the Malay electorates economically through small entrepreneurship and a special emphasis was on agriculture.

There were localised minor issues that were raised during the campaign eg. traffic problem in the cities, excessively high toll rates and increasing living cost. As in the past, issues pertaining to women and children did not get attention and was not the major focus for any political party in the country.

The ruling coalition, Barisan National, in its Manifesto had only mentioned women in 3 points:

- The BN accepts all level of people, including youth, WOMEN and rural community as a national asset and that all has a role to play in the national development.
- The BN invites people of all level to play their role in the national development especially youth, WOMEN and the rural community, which forms the majority of the national population.
- To improve conditions in the working place for men and WOMEN in an environment conducive for to work and contribute to the national economy.

The opposition front fashioned as the Barisan Alternative, also highlighted 3 points in its manifesto to uplift the conditions of the women in the country:

- To upgrade the rights of the WOMEN by providing 30 percent of the policy making level post for the women.
- To eradicate social ills like violence and abuse against WOMEN and children



- To implement the provision of subsistence allowance for single mothers

The Democratic Action Party (DAP), another opposition party that did not ally itself with BA during this election did not have a clear statement for the women and children.

Background

Women NGOs have been for many years lobbying for their rights and the empowerment of women.

The most significant initiative was 'Women's Agenda for Change' (WAC), which emphasized on the involvement and representation of women in decision making positions in the private and public sector.

These efforts did not see any progressive developments or results that can be appreciated. This is more pronounced where minority group and women folks are concerned, especially the ethnic Indian women.

This is mainly due to the low socio economic status of the Indian community that has a share of 1.5 percent of the national economic wealth, compared to the Malays having 19.4 and the Chinese with 38.5 percent.

Fifteen percent of the population lives in squatter settlements in the city and are employed as labourers with total household income below the minimum wage.

Due to poverty and the lack of proper social environment, social tension and intra community dispute has been the bane of this community. Crime rate and domestic violence has been on the rise, not to mention the number of suicides.

A survey conducted by a women's organization revealed that 4 out of 10 families experiences domestic violence, even though there are laws against domestic violence in this country. These laws though enacted has not been fully explained or well enforced, especially so when it involves the police and the hospital personnel whose attitude does not encourage the women to come forward to report such incidents.

Large number of Indian women who go through this ordeal has had their ceremonial wedding but has not registered their marriage as required by the law [The Marriage and Divorce Law- Law reform Act] that came into force in 1982.

Given the circumstances, the ethnic minority Indian women are in need of attention for a social and legislative change.



Our Demands

The Expert Consultation meeting and the Annual Evaluation workshop that was conducted on the 22nd and 23rd April 2004, has made its preliminary findings and made the following demands to uplift, promote and preserve the equal rights of women and especially that of the Indian women in the country:

- The government to reiterate enforcement of the Law Reform- Marriage and Divorce Act (1976)
- Reiterate the enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act (1994)
- To effectively enforce all laws pertaining to violence against women including the Penal Code - laws related to rape and the Sexual Harassment Bill, in the work place for women.
- To review procedures pertaining to violence against women and to amend necessary laws and policies so as to enable the victims of violence to receive protection and support, which is gender sensitive from the authorities, concerned.
- To upgrade and implement gender sensitisation education programmes.

This memorandum was prepared based on discussions and recommendations of stakeholders at the workshop held on the 23 April 2004, pursuant to the findings of the workshop and the manifestos of the political parties for the 2004 general election. The organizers and the participating organisations would like to see implementation of the abovementioned demands.





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