

Support for fight against gender discrimination

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I refer to the story “Small Victory for Stewardess” (June 1). I echo Beatrice Fernandez’s view that women are still getting a shoddy deal in the move to reverse discriminatory practices.

By “allowing” MAS stewardesses to have 3 children instead of 2, and raising the retirement age to 55 by having the option for ground jobs, the basic discriminatory practices and disregard for basic rights are still evident.

Having children is the basic right of any human being, male or female, regardless of the number of children. What is the fundamental rationale for this? Are stewardesses not able to perform her duties as well after having three children whereas stewards can?

A male cabin crew’s retirement age is 55 whereas although it appears that the retirement age for women has been “increased” to 55 years, it is only applicable to flight attendants with supervisory positions and they have to work as ground crew from age 40 onwards. The majority of the female flight attendants would still have to retire at 40.

The new provisions that are said to be “the best in the region” by the Transport Minister are merely token gestures. By accepting these token gestures, the Ministry is effectively endorsing the contravention of Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitution, which stipulates that no one should be discriminated against on grounds of gender. Let us all also be reminded that this contravenes the right to equal employment enshrined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), ratified by Malaysia in 1995.

The unequal retirement age of stewards and stewardesses is an issue with most of the airlines around the world and I question this practice of gender discrimination in the airline industry. In most industries, as the working years of the employees’ increases, their value to the company increases as their experiences increases. Why is the airline industry turning away such valuable resources? What are they really selling; youth, glamour and beauty? Or safety of their passengers brought upon by competent, experienced staff.

Ms Fernandez’s courage in voicing up and her continuous fight for justice is very much an inspiration. Airlines should review their discriminatory practices as it would be eventually be bad for business. The general public is becoming more gender sensitized and would not put up with such discriminations.