

## **AWAM Press Statement on The Star's Voices of Moderation Campaign**

*27th August 2014*

PETALING JAYA – Over the past two weeks, The Star has begun a new 'Voices of Moderation' campaign that aims to provide a platform for more liberal, moderate and balanced voices of the Malaysian people. The aim of the campaign is to push for moderation and to reject the surge of extremism that has been in the forefront of the public eye.

In recent times, voices with more extreme or fundamentalist views which call for violence or discrimination, have been ringing loudly in the country. These voices politicise ethnicity and religion in Malaysia, which more often than not, have a disproportionately negative impact on women.

With access to online spaces and platforms today, these voices have been able to get their messages out in ways that others have not been able to in the past. The media plays a role also in amplifying such voices, particularly when the sensationalism of such voices can lead to increased news circulation.

AWAM believes that the majority of Malaysians do not support these views, and that in fact, these opinions are held by a handful of groups that have been allowed to flourish and promote hatred and intolerance of difference. Many do not speak out, perhaps because they believe their views are not in line with the dominant narrative that is out there.

For meaningful change to happen, we need a more systemic change in Malaysia. Besides the media, our education system needs to foster unity, not division and segregation. There must also be positive government intervention when groups with extremist views threaten the safety and rights of Malaysians.

The Star's Voices of Moderation campaign is one of the many initiatives out there aimed at building bridges and fostering a culture of engagement. It is AWAM's hope that such an initiative will encourage the public to share their views, through letters to the editors and guest columnists. We also hope that other media will create such platforms for diverse views.