



AWAM'S STATEMENTS IN 2013

For more information, contact AWAM:

Tel: 03 7877 4221

Email: awam [at] awam [dot] org [dot] my

1. AWAM Statement regarding the burning of bibles with the word "Allah" | 26 January

As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, it is important to be able to engage and discuss diversity and difference in a respectful manner. Regardless of who said what, we should not lose sight of what core messages our politicians and public officials are conveying, and weighing carefully the content of these messages. We should encourage more open and rational discourse of issues with the aim of promoting understanding, instead of closing or limiting dialogues and platforms for discussions. In order for us to grow as a society we need to have these debates, even on religious matters. What is important is the way we engage with such debates, with respect and by adhering to principles. We should certainly not put up with hate speech, and a call to burn a holy book is certainly not the kind of discourse we should engage with.

Coverage: [Politicians told to stop fanning hatred - General - New Straits Times](#)

2. AWAM Statement on Women's Candidacy at the GE13 | 3 April

There must be political will to level the playing field and field women candidates. Women party members work hard and support their parties just like their male counterparts but come election time, are not considered as candidates. Parties have to start building the capacity of potential women candidates and supporting them to stand for elections in winnable seats. Political parties which provide opportunities for women candidates to stand for elections demonstrate political will towards women's equality. If parties are afraid that women candidates will lose, there is no guarantee that male candidates are a sure win!

Coverage: GE13: [Pahang PAS not fielding women candidates-General-The Star](#)

3. AWAM's Statement on Women's Political Participation | 3 April

AWAM believes that women must be represented at all levels of decision-making. If political parties are serious about ensuring women's voices are heard and represented, they must field women candidates in winnable seats. It is encouraging that some political parties have in place temporary special measures such as quotas for women candidates to ensure women's political participation. However, all parties should have in place such quotas, and for such quotas to be a reality, there must be a concrete timeline for its achievement. At the 2008 General Elections, there were only 118 women candidates out of 1,588 (7.4 per cent). We hope this elections will show more encouraging figures!

We recognise however, that public and political spaces continue to be hostile towards women. Sexist comments from Members of Parliament and the lack of reprimand from peers

indicate a tacit acceptance of such behaviour. AWAM as part of the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) will be highlighting such sexist and misogynistic comments at its upcoming "Aiyoh...Wat Lah?!" Awards and we encourage the public to vote on the most gender discriminatory statements at <http://aiyohwatlah.tumblr.com/> .

Women make up half the electorate and have raised concerns over many issues including personal safety, living costs, childcare, the environment and women's political participation. We contribute to Malaysia's economy and we are part of the nation building process. In the past few years, we have seen women such as Auntie Bersih, Ambiga Sreevanesan and Mama Bersih taking to the streets for clean elections. We have seen women take part in green activism. All of these women have had a critical part to play in bringing women's voices and presence to the political and public arena.

This election, AWAM believes that women's voices will be heard. Our votes will represent our voices. AWAM as part of JAG has developed a women voters video called Undi Anda Suara Anda, which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/wanitaundi> . Certainly, we believe that women will be coming out to vote these elections and fulfil their obligations as citizens and nation builders.

Issued by: All Women's Action Society (AWAM)

Coverage: ['Women must seek bigger political role' - General - The New Straits Times](#)

4. AWAM's Letter to the Editor on Women's Candidates- Diversity in Representation | 22nd April

AWAM supports women candidates that have a well-known human rights track record, and who demonstrate their integrity and commitment to the interests of the rakyat. We hope that come tomorrow, the 20th of April, we will see such women candidates being nominated by every major party.

Women make up half the electorate and have raised concerns over issues close to our hearts including personal safety, living costs, the environment and women's equal access to resources, as well as public and political spaces. We contribute greatly to Malaysia's economy and we are nation builders in our own right.

However, when it comes to representation in the legislature and executive, we are all but invisible. According to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development's 2012 booklet on statistics, only 10.4% of Members of Parliament are women. At the state level, only 8% of state legislative assembly members are women.

Fielding women candidates in the upcoming election is but one step towards ensuring that women's voices are heard. Women party members work hard support their parties and are just as capable as their male counterparts. Political parties which provide opportunities for women candidates to stand for elections demonstrate political will towards women's equality. If political parties are serious about ensuring women's voices are heard and represented, they must field no less than 30% women candidates.

Diversity in representation is crucial as it makes for better decision-making and helps build a democracy and a political culture that represents diverse interests and values. A government that represents these values and takes measures to ensure, amongst other, fair and equal representation is certainly one that we look forward to supporting.

Coverage: [Ensure women's voices are heard- Letter To the Editor- News Straits Times](#)

5. AWAM Rejects Ethnic Politics and Embraces Diversity | 10 May

The All Women's Action Society (AWAM) denounces ethnic politics and racially charged statements meant to create strife and polarisation within the rakyat. The recent references to a 'Chinese Tsunami' by national leaders and sensationalist news coverage such as "Orang Cina Malaysia, apa lagi yang anda mahu?" from Utusan, are obvious attempts at dividing the rakyat.

At the root of it, the people have voted to send a clear message that we want change for the better. Women, regardless of ethnicity, have clear demands and will continue to exercise our rights, not just at the elections but as conscientious rakyat in ensuring that our State meets these demands post-elections. Our demands include, a clean government that is free of corruption, a decent living wage for workers, a better quality of life, an end to gender based violence, repeal of oppressive laws (including the Peaceful Assembly Act, Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, Official Secrets Act and the Printing Presses and Publications Act), as well as free and fair elections.

AWAM denounces politicians who utilise ethnicity and religion to forward their own agendas. Instead we embrace diversity. Our differences and diverse opinions are opportunities for exchange and new understanding. Our unity and progress as a nation does not require that we be homogenous. We call on the rakyat to reject such reckless play on racial sentiments, and to come together instead to work towards a Malaysia that we can continue to be proud of.

Coverage: [AWAM rejects play on racial sentiments – Letter- Free Malaysia Today](#)

6. AWAM's Statement on the Legal Status of Abortion | 29 May

It is a common misconception that abortions are illegal in Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the few countries with the least restrictive laws governing abortion. Section 312 of the Penal Code Amendment Act (1989) allows a medical practitioner registered under the 1971 Medical Act to "terminate the pregnancy of a woman if such medical practitioner is of the opinion, formed in good faith, that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman or injury to the mental and physical health of the pregnant woman greater than if the pregnancy were terminated." Due to the stigma and misconceptions about the legalities of abortion, many women have been denied of their rights under the law.

The All Women's Action Society (AWAM) is in the opinion that women themselves need to be the main decision makers as to when a pregnancy is injurious to their mental health. As a feminist organisation, we believe that a woman has the right to decide what she can and cannot do with her body.

In addition to that, it is also equally important that initiatives are set up to ensure proper access to information to help women make more informed choices. Safe and affordable reproductive health services should also be more readily accessible. By not providing such services, women are often forced to resort to illegal and unsafe abortion services that will in

turn, have grave consequences on their health and overall well-being.

7. AWAM's Statement regarding JAG's Online Petition to end Child Marriage | 19 June

JAG's petition to the Prime Minister to end child marriage has almost reached our initial target of 1000 signatures, so we have in fact, increased the target to 3000 signatures to allow more Malaysians to sign on.

The positive response to the petition indicates that many in Malaysia are against child marriage and want to see an end to such a practice. We hope the petition will continue to raise public awareness of this issue. We have also raised this issue on other media, such as on NTV7's Breakfast show on 4th June 2013.

The Malaysian government must put a stop to the practice of child marriage by raising the minimum age for marriage to 18, without exceptions. This is the standard set by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Malaysia has ratified and is bound by. Legal reform is required to bring our local laws in line with this standard. Currently, local law allows exceptions for child marriage, and has a lower minimum age for marriage for Muslim girls. All girls must be equally protected regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

There must be more awareness building around child marriage to change attitudes and perceptions towards such a practice, including working at the ground level with communities that still think child marriage is acceptable based on culture or tradition.

A comprehensive approach to sex education is also needed. Such a syllabus would provide children and young people with age-appropriate information about their bodies, self-acceptance, healthy relationships, respect and trust in a relationship, address reproductive health concerns, and also ways to keep themselves safe from abuse/harm. Lack of information and knowledge can lead to unwanted pregnancies and in the Malaysian context, child marriages. A comprehensive approach to sex education would go a long way in addressing the issue of child marriage.

Poverty is also another factor contributing to child marriage. The government must work towards eradicating poverty and ensuring that girls, particularly those from marginalised communities, are accessing to education. AWAM believes that children have the right to a safe and happy childhood, which includes the right to play and learn. Child marriage robs a child of her/his right to such a childhood.

The petition can be found at: <http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/prime-minister-yab-dato-sri-mohd-najib-razak-end-child-marriage-in-malaysia>

8. AWAM's Response to SUKMA Rape case | 6 July

AWAM views the alleged rape in the recent SUKMA Games as a serious offence that must be treated seriously. Reports of rape must be taken seriously at all times, not only when it involves sports and the image of the country. The Malaysian Penal Code has laws that deal with rape offences. Any offenders when found guilty of rape must be punished in accordance with the law. There should not be a repeat of the 2010 SUKMA case where a

bowler who was found guilty of rape was later set free using the justification of various reasons, thus making light of such serious offence.

Not only is it important to ensure that a person who commits rape is dealt with in accordance with the law, it is equally important to ensure that effective preventive measures are taken to avoid future incidents of such crimes. An important step when addressing rape cases is to ensure that we do not blame the victim. Victim-blaming, as could be seen in the newspaper's reporting of the case not only shifts the responsibility of preventing rape on the victim, it also enables rapists to justify their crime and get off with lighter sentences. In this case, the newspaper reported that the victim had participated in a gathering with other male athletes that also involved the consumption of alcohol. This painted the picture that she had "invited" the assault by drinking and mingling with men. This is a clear case of victim-blaming that must be stopped!

AWAM wishes to extend our support to this brave young survivor who reported the rape where others may have kept silent due to the victim-blaming culture of society, which often allows the perpetrators to escape.

An important step towards addressing the problem of rape lies in our education system. A holistic education system must include lessons on respect for people regardless of their sex and gender. Only when our nation's youth are taught to respect one another can we seriously talk about addressing discrimination based on sex and gender as stated in Article 8(2) of our Federal Constitution. It is evident that even in the field of sports where discipline is a key element, our athletes have failed to practice respect and restraint from violating another person.

Women should not be singled out to be educated to "protect" themselves be it in a sport's village or in society. It is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that they do not commit a crime, the crime in this case being rape. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Malaysia is a party, states that it is part of the State's obligation to protect and fulfil the rights of women. Rape is a violation of the rights of women to her dignity and safety to her life. All citizens should learn to treat women with respect, without discrimination to ensure that women, as equal citizens of Malaysia are able to live their life without the fear of violence against women, in this case – Rape!

Rape is a crime and it is allowed to happen because in part due to our education system. Our young citizens have not reached the level where women are treated with respect and not discriminated or treated differently as prescribed in our Constitution Article 8 (2). It is evident that even in the field of sports where discipline is a key element, our young athletes failed in this important aspect.

9. Response to Rantau Panjang's MP's comments on Women's Dressing | 11 July

More often than not, the way a woman dresses is seen to be a contributing factor to whether a sexual crime will occur. No woman wants or deserves to be assaulted regardless of how she dresses, and every woman who is assaulted is entitled to justice without having to suffer humiliation or the destruction of her privacy and dignity. It is thus most regrettable that a blame culture takes place whenever there is a sexual crime.

This absolves the perpetrators and places the blame on the victims instead. Policing the way a woman dresses will not prevent sexual crimes. Women should not be told to follow a certain dress code in the name of preventing sexual crimes or for the safety of women. Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution provides that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of gender. Furthermore, The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), of which Malaysia is a signatory, does not allow discrimination on the basis of Sex Role Stereotyping and Prejudices (Art. 5) and Economic and Social Benefits (Art. 13). Society needs to challenge woman-blaming attitudes that centre on their appearance and must instead treat all women with respect. AWAM would encourage better enforcement by the Police force to ensure sexual crimes are being prevented instead.

AWAM believes that the root cause of sexual crimes is in part due to the patriarchal mind-set of society which privileges men and blames women. Our education system needs to look into gender issues to remove this culture of blame. AWAM disapproves of victim-blaming. It is time that society works towards eliminating and preventing sexual crimes towards women, by placing the blame on the perpetrators.

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) has campaigned since 2001 for stand-alone Act against Sexual Harassment. Current laws which provide redress under the Penal Code requires a higher burden of proof, i.e. beyond reasonable doubt, which is not available when sexual harassment occurs. A Draft bill on Sexual Harassment has been submitted to the Women's Ministry, yet after much consultation, there is still no information whether such a bill on sexual harassment will be tabled.

10. AWAM response on flexible working arrangement for women | 28 October

Although promoting flexible working arrangement for women may increase women's participation in the workforce, it would be preferable to promote flexible working options for 'parents', rather than just women or mothers. This is because both men and women must be equally encouraged to share the responsibilities of child-raising and domestic work.

Promoting flexible work arrangement for women only maintains the stereotype that women must be the primary caregiver and homemaker. It can also result in women being 'stuck' in low paying and vulnerable jobs, as well as being discriminated in terms of promotion opportunities.

In addition, flexible arrangements may place more stress on women as women who take on such arrangements may still expected to perform as if she worked in the office. This means that if the arrangement is for a 4-hour work day, she may still have to deliver 8-hours' worth of work. The combination of domestic work and office work is not only stressful, but may result in these women being seen as not productive.

In today's context, we need to look beyond the stereotyped 'traditional' roles for men and women. Maternity and child rearing is a social function and should not fall only on the shoulders of women alone. Such a view places the obligation on women to undertake the 'double burden' of working in the home, taking care of children and seeking paid employment outside of the home.

Instead, our policies should encourage fathers or 'parents' to seek flexible work arrangements so that care for children and housework can be shared.

11. AWAM's statement on Domestic Violence against Men | 9 November

While there are reports of increase in domestic violence against men, the reason for such violence is still not ascertained. In most cases of violence against women, it is due to power and control. It is possible the same could be the cause of violence to men. The rising stress in society at home and work, due to various social and economic factors can be another factor that contributes to the violence that takes place. Another reason for violence to take place is the lack of respect for the other person. In view of this, society needs to inculcate this human value to individuals from young. The school curriculum should stress on the rights and equality amongst men and women and the need to respect each person. The government can play a role in encouraging school curriculum to look into this aspect. The society should be made aware that violence, whether against women, cannot be accepted. Anyone who faces violence, be it men or women, have the choice of speaking out and taking action, in order to end the violence. Everyone, men and women have a role to play to stop violence!