

Deployment of Police Officers to JAIS Reflects Misplaced Priorities

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) questions the need of the decision by The Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) to conduct a pilot project which places two police officers and a Sergeant at the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) to assist in the enforcement of Syariah laws. We are especially concerned as PDRM is a federal body and the allocation of federal resources for a state religious body reflects grave misplacement of priorities.

While the deployment of police officers at JAIS may seem like an effort to increase accountability and professionalism of the religious authorities, this pilot project would likely only focus on the implementation of the Selangor Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment specifically on moral policing, with little attention given to the laws themselves and their impact on our fundamental liberties.

Wouldn't federal resources be better spent on tackling issues of gender-based violence rather than on moral policing? According to the Malaysian Government's Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, in 2014 there were 3,545 reported cases of domestic violence and 2,045 reported cases of rape. Bearing in mind that these statistics are just of reported cases, resources should be allocated for sufficient numbers of police officers as well as for their training to ensure proper investigation and victim support. Deploying police officers to One Stop Crisis Centres and remote districts in Sabah to help more women and children benefit from the Domestic Violence Act is an example of how PDRM's resources could be better utilised. PDRM's involvement should not be a backdoor means of legitimising JAIS' activities.

The larger enforcement issue should be in ensuring JAIS' compliance to the rule of law, including implementing procedural laws and Standard Operating Procedures applicable before, and during and after raids and arrests, which, reportedly have failed to be addressed adequately. In some instances, raids have resulted in fatalities, yet religious authorities have not been held accountable.

Greater accountability on the part of public institutions such as JAIS can be achieved by enhancing the ability of citizens to scrutinise the use of public funds and to engage with the authorities in a dialogue on how taxpayers want their money to be spent. Further, to monitoring and conducting due diligence on the impact of JAIS' activities must be implemented.

We strongly urge JAIS to prioritise increasing the professionalism of their officials through robust, consistent and effective training programs at their

national training centre or Institute Latihan Islam Malaysia (ILIM). Any action taken by JAIS or any enforcement agency must be guided by principles of justice, by focusing on due diligence, sensitivity, and compliance with Syariah procedural laws and compassion.

JAG has long called for the Government to establish laws and policies that are compliant with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and to stay the course in improving women's human rights. We reiterate that it is not the role of the state to regulate personal lives in Malaysia, nor is it the true purpose of Syariah.

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Endorsed by the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG):

1. Sisters in Islam (SIS)
2. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
3. Women's Centre for Change Penang (WCC)
4. Justice for Sisters (JFS)
5. Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO)
6. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
7. Perak Women for Women Society (PWW)
8. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
9. Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)