

Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) Letter to the Editor Decrying Threats to G25 Spokesperson Datuk Noor Farida Ariffin

For release on Wednesday 16 December 2015

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) is outraged and appalled at statements made on social media by Sharul Nizam Ab Rahim, president of the Animal Action Group, threatening to break into Datuk Noor Farida's bedroom and rape her. Such criminal threats were made pursuant to a press conference, in which Datuk Noor Farida announced that G25 was setting up a committee to review *khalwat* laws and other Shariah enactments that encroach on personal privacy, and to recommend repeal or amendment.

JAG condemns not only the act of rape—a heinous form of violence against women—but also the use of threats of violence, via social media and other mediums, as a means to instill in women a fear of exercising their right of free speech. Such intimidation is not only abhorrent; it is criminal. Section 503 of the Penal Code provides in relevant part that, “Whoever threatens another with any injury to his person...with intent to cause alarm to that person...or to cause that person to do any act which he is not legally bound to do, or to omit to do any act which that person is legally entitled to do...commits criminal intimidation.” The police must take action against Sharul Nizam and other abusive men who utilize criminal intimidation to silence the voices of women.

Such vile tactics are habitually used against women, and especially against women activists, to attack women's rights. As a staunch advocate for women, Datuk Noor Farida, who formerly served as the president of the Association of Women Lawyers, and is a current Trustee and former Executive Committee member of Women's Aid Organisation, has been subjected to criticism before. Her more recent role as spokesperson for G25 has put her further in the spotlight, making her a bigger target for conservative Muslims reacting to the group's condemnation of growing religious extremism in Malaysia.

Sharul Nizam's comments are indicative of a broader, ongoing suppression of women human rights defenders in Malaysia. Such suppression has in the past included the charging of individuals under arbitrary laws, including Bersih 2.0 chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah, who was charged under the Peaceful Assembly Act. Comments by elected representatives marginalizing and discriminating against women have served as further fodder for misogynist and conservative elements.

JAG calls upon all individuals, including government officials and private citizens alike, to speak out against the abhorrent remarks of Sharul Nizam Ab Rahim, and to defend the freedom of all women to exercise their right of free speech without fear of being subjected to violence and intimidation as a result.

The Joint Action Group For Gender Equality (JAG) comprises:

1. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
2. Tenaganita
3. Perak Women for Women (PWW)
4. Sisters in Islam (SIS)
5. Association of Women's Lawyers (AWL)
6. Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS)
7. Women's Centre for Change (WCC)
8. Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO)
9. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (Empower)
10. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
11. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)