

Plight of working class women remain unresolved after 100 years.

JOINT STATEMENT IN-CONJUNCTION WITH INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2017

Every year, on this day, women are celebrated the world over for the unique role they play in society.

However, it is disappointing to reflect that the issues women struggled with, a hundred years ago in 1917, when working class women took to the streets demanding for “Bread & Peace” in feudal Russia, remain the same, even if their uprising had led to the downfall of the oppressive Tsar regime and initiated this global annual commemoration for women.

The struggle for “bread and butter” is still an issue because working class women and single mothers are unable to meet their family needs due to low wages and rising cost of living.

On this day, brave women in our community who have stepped-up to uphold the rights of women and the downtrodden are showcased as exemplary figures while we take stock of progress made in our struggle for equality in a burgeoning global community.

Thus, we are enraged that the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. Should take a hefty budget cut for 2017 in the midst of a bloated budget. The drop from RM 1.87 billion in 2016 to RM 1.75 billion this year is indicative of the government's view that the RM 120 million can be put to better use than assisting urban poor, working class women, single mothers, their school going children and the vulnerable who require the protection of the Welfare Department.

According to statistics provided by the ministry, 61,600 single mothers were recipients of a total of RM 151 million in 2014. However, in response to a parliamentary question, the ministry reported that 830,000 single mothers were recorded in the country. Even if less than half of the latter figure (40%) should fall under the low-income bracket, it is indicative that the welfare department will have to turn away at least 270,400 applicants.

An urgent revision of its priorities is urged of the government and a boost in the allocation to this ministry that will truly reflect the role it should play toward the “well-being of the Rakyat” be implemented immediately.

Low income single mothers are hit the hardest especially because there is no change to the Poverty Line Income Measurement which qualifies only those earning a monthly wage of RM750 and less, to financial aid.

This welfare benefit cap is cruel and provides no solution to helping low-income families out of poverty especially those led by single mothers. The “RM750” eligibility ceiling should be increased to RM1, 500 to facilitate the current expenditure trends for basic necessities.

We also call for a proactive revision on the classification of the term “single mothers” eligible for welfare aid, to include women with children below the age of 18 years whose husbands are inmates in prisons. Having lost their entire household income through no fault of theirs, many women and children are displaced with potential risk to their health, education and well-being.

We can foresee that the government will no doubt acknowledge International Women’s Day with activities and actions that will highlight achievements of prominent women in business and social leaders, in an attempt to prove its role in implementing initiatives that have successfully upgraded women.

These “showcasing” are grand farcical attempts at masking the real sufferings of working class women whose lives will further deteriorate following the budget cut.

In 1975, March 8 was adopted as the International Women’s Day, yet Malaysia has made little progress in moving away from a patriarchal system that does little to reduce gender disparities, defend the rights of or alleviate women from discrimination and violence.

We the undersigned call upon the Malaysian government to:

1. Inflate the budget allocated to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, by doubling the 2016 allocation as this ministry is responsible for the improvement of the lives of people who are the foundation of the nation – the working class.
2. Raise the Poverty Line Income Measurement to RM1, 500 and set up a system that monitors their progress in livelihood.
3. Set up government funded crèches at all low cost residential areas, in stages, to provide a safe and secure environment for children of the working class. Children from low cost homes should automatically be registered in quality crèches.
4. Revise the classification of the term “single mothers” eligible for welfare aid, to include women with children below the age of 18 years whose husbands are inmates in prisons.
5. Introduce a new-low-rate for low cost homes especially for low income single mothers with an easy payment hire-purchase scheme.
6. Revisit single-mother-applications that were rejected by the Welfare Department and introduce a new scheme that will allow for the department to analyze problems and issues faced by single mothers, and is able to implement new schemes to elevate their standard of living.
7. The Jaringan Rakan Ibu Tunggal has engaged with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development from 2014 through a memorandum and a dialogue. However, none of our recommendations were implemented. We reiterate the seriousness of challenges and needs of single mothers, the most vulnerable of working class women

The above joint statement in conjunction with International Women's Day is endorsed by the following organisations;

1. Parti Sosialis Malaysia
2. Community Development Centre, Kajang (CDC)
3. Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT)
4. PACOS trust
5. Persataun Wanita Selangor
6. Women's Centre for Change (Penang)
7. Inter-Research And Studies (IRAS)
8. Aliran
9. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation (MSN)
10. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)
11. National Union of Flight Attendants Malaysia (Nufam)
12. Projek Dialog
13. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
14. Research for Social Advancement Relevant Facts, Sparkling Analysis (REFSA)
15. In Between Cultura
16. Pusat KOMAS
17. Diversity
18. Persatuan Kebajikan Arutperunjothi Margam
19. HINDRAF
20. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
21. The North South Initiative
22. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)