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**KUALA LUMPUR, [30<sup>th</sup> May 2016]** - The All Women's Action Society (AWAM) is deeply concerned by the decision of the Sessions Court to sentence Vivian Lee May Ling to six months in jail for her role in uploading a Ramadan bak kut teh post on Facebook.

While the said act was done in poor taste, we feel the court sentence is misguided. We question what message the state seeks to send out to Malaysians about this case, and how that will help mend already fraught ethnic and religious relations within the country.

In support of Vivian, since her arrest she has been consistent in maintaining that she did not consent to uploading the offending clip even when she was party to its filming. This, we feel, should have been taken into account in mitigating her sentence. It appears like Vivian has been made to pay for a crime because the other person accused, a former boyfriend, is still at large.

AWAM believes that we should be looking at the bigger picture and focus on the fraying state of the ethnic relations within our country rather than going after these two individuals. It is the repeated abuse of ethnicity and religion as political capital by those in power that has strained relations between different ethnic and religious communities in Malaysia. The imposed silence due to “infringement of religious sensibilities” of certain groups does not invite understanding, but instead causes even more division, and we believe that this court decision furthers this damaging line of thinking.

We hope the Court of Appeal will be more judicious in its review of the case.