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For Immediate Release

GBM: Having women leaders is a Nusantara tradition and all misogynic politicians should be rejected

Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GBM) opines that that no one should be denied the right to hold high public offices including that of Menteri Besar or even Prime Minister based on their gender. National women leaders are not only a global phenomenon but are also found in the Nusantara tradition.

Gender exclusion is not only unfair to those discriminated against, but also denies the nation half of the talent pool. Politicians upholding misogynistic views, whether vulgarly or politely expressed, should be shunned by the electorate.

GBM is astounded at the sexist and chauvinistic comments made by UMNO lawyer, Datuk Mohd Hafarizam Harun. As a professional, Datuk Hafarizam should be fully aware that a person's capability bears no direct relationship with his/her biological make-up. A woman's menses is part of her natural biological cycle and does not in any way prevent her from leading successfully with integrity, professionalism and dedication.

We strongly object to Datuk Hafarizam's attempt to justify his sexist discrimination argument by citing religious reference out of context. His utterance reinforces the stereotyping of women as inferior and weak because of their biological nature. It is derogatory and adds to the discrimination against women in all spheres of life.

We are also appalled by PAS Selangor expressing their non-support for women as MB, but only as lawmakers. As a party claiming to uphold justice and equality for all, PAS Selangor cannot therefore support sexual discrimination of employment in high offices. Any qualified person should be entitled to hold any political office as long as they enjoy the trust and mandate of the electorate and by extension the governing political party.

History testifies that competent women leading nations is not just a growing global phenomenon, but also a glorious tradition in Nusantara. The struggle against the Portuguese invasion after the fall of Malacca in 1511 was led by Tun Fatimah, the queen of the last Sultan. One of Kelantan's greatest rulers was Che Siti Wan Kembang in the 17th Century who brought prosperity to the state. The Kijang (barking deer) in our Bank Negara Malaysia's logo has its origin in her pet kijang, whose image was inscribed on our coins. Benevolent and competent queens were also found in the kingdoms of Pattani and Aceh.

GBM holds that only male politicians lacking competence and confidence would fear the rise of capable women to high offices. Competent and confident men have no problem working with talented women either as their subordinates, peers or superiors. We advise male politicians suffering from misogyny and male chauvinism to seek help through gender sensitisation programmes.

Misogynic politicians should realise that time is against them as more women are rising to high positions and the nation is benefiting from this. In Malaysia, over 40% of women formed the labour force market and many of them are in different levels of decision-making or leadership positions. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia census in 2005, a total of over 82,000 business establishments were owned by women entrepreneurs in leadership roles, managing their businesses and creating value for the nation.

We would like to bring to the attention of Datuk Hafarizam and PAS Selangor that the Federal Constitution Article 8 clearly states that there should be no discrimination on the basis of gender. Malaysia has also ratified the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and Malaysia has to fulfil its duty and obligation by embarking on programmes to address stereotypes, prejudices and practices and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women either in the public or political sphere.

One of the 15-clauses of GBM's Charter states: *GBM "Affirms gender justice based on international instruments that provide substantive equality to women, with opportunities and access in nation-building by eliminating discrimination and systemic prejudices."*