



**The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) comprises:**

All Women's Action Society (AWAM)  
Perak Women for Women Society (PWW)  
Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)  
Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)  
Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO)  
Sisters in Islam (SIS)  
Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)  
Women's Centre for Change, Penang (WCC)

### **For Immediate Release**

23 June 2012

### **JAG's Aiyoh...Wat Lah?! gives awards to highlight public examples of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia**

Kuala Lumpur, 23 June—The Joint Action Group on Gender Equality (JAG) today announced the winners of the inaugural Aiyoh...Wat Lah?! Awards at The Annexe Gallery. A selection of public statements and actions from 2011 displaying sexism, misogyny, homophobia, or transphobia were voted on for categories such as “Foot in Mouth”, “Least Helpful to the Sisterhood”, and “Cannot Ignore”. A final category “Right on Track” awards public statements or actions deemed particularly helpful in fighting discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Winning for **Foot in Mouth** was an analogy between unwanted buildings and old women, while **Policy Fail** of 2011 went to Terengganu's state-run boot camp to “cure” teenage boys of effeminate behaviour, with the government's failure to recognise male-to-female transgenders as women coming in a close second. **Ad Nauseam**, which awards public statements or actions that repeat a sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, or transphobic message, went to “repeated references to ‘prostitutes’ in a negative way.”

Winning in the **Insulting Intelligence** and **Least Helpful to the Sisterhood** categories were statements attributing blame for men's extramarital affairs to wives who “neglect their responsibilities” and “don't satisfy their husbands” respectively. Commenting on this, JAG spokesperson Syarifatul Adibah (Sisters in Islam) said, “Perhaps it hit a nerve with women who must wonder why it is so often the wife who is expected to bear responsibility for the success of her marriage by her family, by society, and even by some members of Parliament!”

Fellow JAG organiser Smita Elena Sharma (All Women's Action Society) also noted that, “Interestingly, 4 of the 6 nominees for Insulting Intelligence were statements reflecting a propensity to invoke ‘Islam’ to defend sexist, homophobic, and transphobic sentiments. It seems de rigueur in contemporary Malaysia to appeal to narrow interpretations of religion in order to avoid grappling with the reasonableness of a certain position.”

Immigration officers' action of forcing two women to perform nude squats for failing to follow proper procedures when entering Malaysia won in the **Cannot Ignore** category which highlights a seriously offensive public statement or act that is particularly damaging to the cause of gender equality and that requires a severe response.

Other nominees in this category included a statement likening a political party to “a wife who complains all day long that she was being abused, raped and not given enough food, but yet does not want to divorce her husband” and a Member of Parliament's claim that women's rights groups criticising him for making sexist remarks were sexually harassing him. “Both these examples indicate how public figures make light of the kinds of violence mostly faced by women, including rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Such violence calls for serious attention from our lawmakers, not for callous comments which are truly unacceptable,” said another JAG organiser, Meera Samanther (Women's Aid Organisation).

Prime Minister Najib's denial that there was gender discrimination in the workplace in Malaysia was yet another contender in the **Cannot Ignore** category. Remarked Meera, “Let's hope that he's become more attuned to the gloomier picture that is reality since taking over as Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. Glass ceilings continue to prevent many women from reaching top positions at work, and women continue to earn unequal wages and often face sexual harassment at the workplace.”

Winning in the **Right on Track** category is the High Court decision in the case of *Noorfadilla binti Ahmad Saikin v Chayed bin Basirun and Others* that CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) is binding on the Malaysian government and that using pregnancy as a reason not to employ a person is a form of gender discrimination. “We congratulate Judge Zaleha Yusof for a fine decision which takes into account the standards that Malaysia holds itself to and is obliged to meet when it ratifies international human rights treaties like CEDAW,” said Smita, who also noted

the tight competition between this decision and a statement by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) condemning hate speech against sexual minorities and opposing the ban on Seksualiti Merdeka. “Standing up for a persecuted minority, now that takes courage,” she added.

Hosting the awards show was Ribena Berry, a character played by actor and writer Jo Kukathas. Said Kukathas about the Aiyoh...Wat Lah?! Awards, “It’s a great idea really and there are so many worthy nominees. Unfortunately there could only be one winner in each category but we hope the losers will continue to make the kind of sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic statements that have endeared them to so many and made us appear backward and laughable to people all over the world. Well done.” She added that she was glad JAG was using humour to highlight the unacceptable and erratic behaviour of public figures and institutions.

The Aiyoh...Wat Lah?! Awards are meant to raise public awareness on what constitutes sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia and to encourage higher standards of public discourse and behaviour in relation to gender and sexuality. Nominated statements and acts for these inaugural awards, which were culled from local media reports in 2011, were voted on by members and supporters of JAG member organisations.

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Released by the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, which comprises:

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