

### **30 June 2018- JAG Statement: Marriageable age must be raised to 18 without exception.**

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) strongly condemns the marriage of an 11-year-old girl as the third wife to a 41-year-old Malaysian man that went viral on social media yesterday, and strongly calls for the authorities to investigate this matter.

Child marriage is not an obligation (not wajib) nor encouraged by Islam (not sunat). The tradition (sunnah) often quoted is the practice by the Prophet Muhammad on his marriage to Aishah.

There is no concrete evidence that Aishah was nine years old at the point of her marriage, and there have been other studies that assert that she was much older (19 years) when she was married to the Prophet.

In the modern Malaysian context, this marriage does not detract from the fact that sexual relations with a child below 16 years is statutory rape.

Child marriage has significant consequences on the child's health and overall psyche and further exposes girls to dangerous violence and abuse.

More importantly, child marriage places obstacles to a girl's formal education with the expectation that she will take care of the household and start a family.

This is in gross violation of Articles 3 and 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which call for the best interests of the child to be the primary consideration in any action by the authorities.

Additionally, there are other Muslim-majority countries that have raised the minimum age of marriage including Algeria (19 for both men and women), Bangladesh (18 for women and 21 for men), Morocco (18 for both men and women) and Turkey (which raised the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 for women).

The solemnisation of marriage, which allegedly took place in Thailand, also demonstrates serious loopholes in our legal system that can be taken advantage of by men to take on more wives without the consent of their previous wives. This must also be reformed.

It is appalling that this case has surfaced barely days after the Girls Not Brides, an international conference held right here in Kuala Lumpur, calling for a global ban on child marriage.

Immediate action must be taken by the government to condemn this action and pledge legislative action to put an end to child marriage in Malaysia once and for all.

This must be done by raising the marriageable age for all Malaysians, Muslims and non-Muslims whether male or female, to 18-years-old, with no exceptions.

This statement is endorsed by the following JAG organisations:

- All Women's Action Society (Awam)
- Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)
- Justice for Sisters
- Perak Women for Women (PWW)
- Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (Empower)

- Sisters in Islam (SIS)
- Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
- Women's Centre for Change (WCC)