

Press Statement
3rd Dec 2009

Bumiputra Status – equality for women

SWWS totally agrees with Datuk Seri Mohd Nazri Aziz, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department that bumiputra status should be passed on by *either* the mother *or* the father.

This is not only in keeping with the times but is a legal obligation. Malaysia is a signatory to the Convention of Elimination against Discrimination to Women (CEDAW) which means that our laws need to reflect this commitment. Due to this convention, the constitution has already been amended once to make it clear that discrimination on grounds of gender is unacceptable in Malaysia. (*For details see previous press statement attached – one which received minimal coverage when originally sent.*)

Sarawak Women for Women Society have already raised this issue through appropriate channels and we now call for the necessary amendments to be made in Parliament and for the matter to be resolved once and for all. The current practice is archaic in its paternalistic attitude. Why are women, who are the ones who give birth to a child, denied the right to pass on their land to their children when they marry a non-bumi? The time has come to be consistent and for the constitution to be amended so all indigenous people across Malaysia, men and women, have the same legal standing.

Margaret Bedus
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Press Statement for release 10th Nov 2009

BUMIPUTRA STATUS: REMEMBER THE WOMEN

Sarawak Women for Women Society supports the various calls to amend Article 161A of the Federal Constitution. It is timely for the definition of bumiputra to be standardized across Malaysia. Logically this means we should also be asking for the status to be passed on from *either* the mother *or* the father as in Sabah and not just endorsing what has been the practiced traditionally within Sarawak.

Such a move would be in keeping with the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which the Malaysian Government signed, with some specified reservations, on 5th July 1995. Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitution, the article pertaining to equality; that there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground of, amongst others, race, religion, descent, place of birth except as expressly authorized by the Constitution, has already been amended. It now includes the word 'gender'. This change, along with other

legislation and programmes, shows the Government's commitment to treat men and women equally as beholds a signatory to the convention.

Now that Article 161A is under the spot-light it is an opportunity for the country to show its progressive approach to equality of the sexes.

SWWS also supports the call to ensure all indigenous races are recognised under the Article not just those named, as highlighted by the Deputy Dewan Raykat Speaker, Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar. We are relieved to see the Penan are already specified as bumiputra and hope that this is well understood by civil servants in all federal departments. Recently we heard someone from the Ministry of Education in KL referring to Penan as pre-bumi, an unacceptable term in the Sarawak context but a mistake not infrequently made by people from Semenanjung when referring to Sarawak natives.

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