

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 Semenanjung and not just endorsing what has been the practice 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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