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WAOmanifesto for #GE15

**Demands for Gender Equality
to safeguard all women & girls**



#GE15 is an opportunity for all political parties to pledge their support for gender equality

We want to see planning and policy for long-term transformative change that will **protect, empower and benefit the lives of women in Malaysia**. We want political parties and candidates to enact policies that will put an end to violence against women and girls in all forms, be it sexual, access to healthcare and education as well as through economic rights.

With this in mind, Women's Aid Organisation presents all political actors with our manifesto, containing **4 key demands**:

1. Commit to upholding gender equality and non-discrimination in the constitution
2. Commit to ending violence against women and girls
3. Ensure women's equal participation and representation in all sectors of public life
4. Commit to a secure economic future for all women to thrive with dignity

1. Commit to upholding gender equality and non-discrimination in the constitution

- Above all else, there is a clear and immediate need to enshrine and embed equality and non discrimination in the Malaysian constitution, the highest form of law in the land. **Amending the constitution would ensure that provisions such as Article 8 will be upheld** and effective in protecting all in Malaysia against discrimination.
- We also call for commitment to **enact the Gender Equality Act** that would also harmonise Malaysia's obligation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), acceded to in 1995. The Gender Equality Act would create a country that is safe and fair towards people regardless of gender, allowing everyone to reach their full potential.

Protect against discrimination by amending the constitution and upholding Article 8

Enact the Gender Equality Act



2. Commit to ending violence against women and girls

- **Make Marital Rape a Crime:** Malaysia is one of just 36 countries in the world that have not yet criminalised Marital Rape. We exhort political parties and MPs to commit to **amend the Penal Code to make marital rape a crime.**
- **End Child Marriage:** In 2018, 1,856 children in Malaysia were married, of which the overwhelming majority (90%) were girls. Married children are more vulnerable to domestic violence, less likely to remain in school, and experience a higher infant mortality rate. By **raising the legal age of marriage nationwide to 18,** Malaysia would ensure children's right to safety, health, and education. This action would be welcomed by the general public, as a nationally representative survey conducted by WAO in 2021 found that **over 70% of Malaysians oppose child marriage.**
- **Implement a comprehensive nation-wide prevention strategy (which feature awareness programmes) to reduce Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV):** A WAO study found that only about half of Malaysians are likely to oppose violence-endorsing attitudes and support gender equality. A comprehensive nation-wide strategy targeted at all levels of society will go a long way to **increase public awareness on SGBV,** including Domestic Violence and child sexual abuse, and reduce its prevalence.
- **Better and improved sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) access:** Currently, access to rights-based sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and information in Malaysia is restricted. The indirect effect of this has been an increased number of unwanted pregnancies, baby dumping, infanticides, and orphaned children. Young pregnant girls have higher health risks related to pregnancy and childbirth; furthermore, adolescents lose an aggregate lifetime earnings due to early childbearing and discontinuation of their education, which in turn reduces their employment options later in life. The new government must **improve SRHR access and comprehensive sexual education (CSE)** in schools to equip young boys and girls to understand sexual reproductive rights, and to create a culture promoting gender equality. This would also go a long way towards ending the cycle of poverty they would otherwise unwittingly enter into.
- **Enhance One-Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) services:** When survivors of violence come forward, they must be assured of swift action and quality treatment. Overburdened OSCC services primarily located in urban hospitals present gaps in which SGBV cases might go untreated and unreported. There must also be no discrimination of cases brought to OSCC and SCAN centres based on citizenship; survivors of sexual and gender-based violence must be provided medical treatment, psychosocial support, and the option to pursue a police report without restrictions. Therefore, the government in power must commit to **enhancing One-Stop Crisis Centres set up in government hospitals, including the identification and referral process** to ensure that no survivor is turned away. Additionally, there must be **robust monitoring and evaluation efforts** to ensure that all OSCCs are equipped with trained staff, tools, equipment, and funding to treat survivors as necessary.



3. Ensure women's equal participation and representation in all sectors of public life

- **Ensure Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB):** Budgets are not gender neutral policy instruments. Practising GRB means not only considering spending, but also the impact that spending has on people from different segments of the community through monitoring and evaluation efforts. The end-goal of GRB is to create a budget that works for everyone and all sectors of the community - not just women and girls. In addressing inequalities, everyone will be better off. This can be done by committing to **collect sex-disaggregated data**, and conducting gender impact assessments, for example, on women in the workforce to identify gaps in gender equality. This monitoring and evaluation of budgetary spending can help address these issues and understand impact and sustainability of previous allocations.
- **Commit to a safe environment for women in media:** A 2020 survey by the National Union of Journalists found that women were less well-represented in senior editorial roles, contributing to a dearth of gender-sensitive narratives and coverage of issues such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and assault. Women journalists are also particularly prone to violence, persecution, and harassment in their line of work. WAO calls for political actors to **ensure a safe environment for women journalists and pledge to implement policies that will enable them to carry out their work without fear of violence, persecution and harassment**.
- **50% political representation and participation:** In the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap report, Malaysia sits at 103rd – a positive shift from last year's low of 112nd. That being said, women's political empowerment in Malaysia is severely lacking, where women make up only 24.85% of legislators, senior officials, and managers; 16% of ministerial positions, and 15% of elected members of parliament. This means that many needs can go under-addressed in decision-making spaces where men are disproportionately represented. Political parties should **target 50% women's political representation and participation in all areas of politics**. The more women represented in decision-making spaces, the more likely that policies contributing to equality for all will be enacted.

According to the World Economic Forum 2022 Global Gender Gap report, women in Malaysia make up only:

24.85%

legislators, senior
officials, and managers

16.13%

of those in ministerial
positions

15%

of those elected to
Parliament



4. Commit to a secure economic future for all women to thrive with dignity

- **Invest in targeted support for women entrepreneurs and business owners in the B40 group:** We applaud the attention to entrepreneurs and small business owners as tabled in Budget 2023; to further improve on these initiatives, we recommend **investing in specific financial services, funding opportunities, and business support for women in the B40 group**, such as single mothers or racial minorities. This group often encounters many barriers to entering the formal economy, such as lacking the collateral needed by many financing schemes and being unable to compete against more established, often male counterparts. Measures specifically targeting the needs of B40 women interested in entrepreneurship would level the playing field, allowing them to compete and diversifying our pool of entrepreneurial talent.
- **Improved childcare access:** A lack of accessible and affordable universal childcare remains one of the biggest barriers to women's labour force participation in Malaysia, which is already low compared to neighbouring ASEAN countries, with our rates stagnating around 55%. We call for **improved access to quality, standards-based childcare** to relieve women of the double burden of unpaid care work.
- **Protect job-seekers from discrimination:** A 2016 survey by WAO found that **40% of pregnant women faced discrimination in the workplace** where they were made redundant, denied promotions, placed on prolonged probations, demoted, and terminated. The recent amendments to the Employment Act 1955 prohibits the termination of female employees who are pregnant or suffering from illness arising out of her pregnancy. However, this does not extend **protection against discrimination for job-seekers to prevent discrimination against pregnant (and potentially pregnant) women looking for jobs.**

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- **Mandate obligation towards preventing and addressing sexual harassment:** With the passing of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill and its anticipated implementation, it is imperative for **organisational duties to be mandated in order to prevent and address sexual harassment to create safe, survivor-centric spaces for all.** Sexual harassment does not just occur between two individuals, but it happens within settings or environments where no measures are in place to protect potential victims. Creating an environment that is safe and free from sexual harassment will facilitate productivity and positive contributions of all Malaysians to the country and economy.
- **Mainstream gender equality in the workplace:** Policies on gender equality in the workplace must be instituted across sectors and industries in Malaysia. These include **policies that ensure more women in leadership positions, equal pay, equitable access to employment opportunities, family-supportive workplaces, and zero tolerance for all forms of discrimination and harassment.** These policies should encompass the whole employment cycle from recruitment, retention to resignation or retirement. Such measures will improve women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) and guarantee participation in public life. According to the World Bank, Malaysia's income per capita could increase by 26.2% if all economic barriers are removed for women. Ensuring gender equality in the workplace benefits all strata of society in the long run.

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About Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

Since 1982, Women's Aid Organisation has provided free shelter, counselling, and crisis support to women and children who experience abuse. We help women and their children rebuild their lives, after surviving domestic violence, rape, trafficking, and other atrocities. Learning from women's experiences, we advocate to improve public policies and shift public mindsets. Together, we change lives.

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