

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AT
THE NATIONAL WORKSHOP TOWARDS ACHIEVING AT LEAST
30% PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AT DECISION-MAKING
LEVELS IN MALAYSIA**

23 OCTOBER 2008

Yang Berusaha Puan Daratul Baida Osman Khairuddin
Wakil Program Pembangunan Pertubuhan Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu,
UNDP

Yang Berhormat Ahli-ahli Parlimen dan Dewan Undangan Negeri

Yang Berbahagia Datuk-datuk, Datin-datin

Puan-puan dan tuan-tuan yang saya muliakan.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan salam sejahtera.

Saya bersyukur kepada Allah s.w.t. kerana dengan limpah kurnia dan hidayahNya kita dapat bersama-sama hadir ke **Bengkel Ke Arah Mencapai Dasar Sekurang-kurangnya 30 Peratus Wanita di Peringkat Pembuat Keputusan** anjuran Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat.

Terlebih dahulu, saya ingin merakamkan setinggi-tinggi penghargaan dan ucapan terima kasih di atas komitmen dan kesediaan ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat serta wakil dari pelbagai kementerian, jabatan dan agensi kerajaan, pertubuhan bukan kerajaan (NGO), institusi pengajian tinggi serta individu-individu lain yang sudi hadir untuk sama-sama menyertai bengkel yang berlangsung selama sehari ini. Penyertaan yang menyeluruh ini sudah pasti memberikan manfaat kepada sesi perbincangan yang diadakan.

Sebagai makluman kepada para hadirin, objektif utama bengkel ini adalah untuk mendapatkan pandangan dan input daripada semua pihak bagi memuktamadkan **laporan akhir** serta **draf Pelan Tindakan Ke Arah Mencapai Sekurang-kurangnya 30% Wanita di Peringkat Pembuat Keputusan di Malaysia**. Penganjuran bengkel ini juga bertujuan mendapatkan komitmen dan *buy-in* daripada semua pihak yang berkepentingan (*stakeholders*) bagi pelaksanaan Pelan Tindakan ini kelak.

Izinkan saya meneruskan ucapan saya dalam bahasa Inggeris.

Introduction

1. I am happy that the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development managed to bring together individuals and organizations that are passionate in working towards promoting women's advancement in Malaysia. Most importantly, today's workshop acknowledges each and everyone of us as a collective

voice that takes upon the consultative role in providing input and feedback on the Draft Integrated Final Report and the proposed Plan of Action (PoA) towards achieving at least 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making levels in Malaysia that have been prepared by the consultants.

2. This workshop is part of the Project of Towards Achieving at Least 30% Women at Decision Making Levels in Malaysia, which began on 1 June 2007 for a duration of 18 months. The project is jointly funded by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia. The objective of this Project is to formulate a plan of action towards the attainment of at least 30 per cent women at decision making levels in Malaysia.

3. Given the current scarcity of women at the top in Malaysia, six broad sectors covering the three arms of government and the economy were chosen to bring about the necessary reforms needed to achieve the target. The sectors are as follows:

- i) Parliament and Political Parties;
- ii) State Legislatures, Executive Councils and Local Councils;
- iii) Ministries;
- iv) Statutory Bodies and Universities;
- v) Judiciary - Civil and Syariah; and
- vi) Private Sector.

4. With that note of the project's background, may I also express my deepest gratitude to UNDP Malaysia for its support and tireless efforts in promoting equality through gender mainstreaming, and for its commitment in working with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to spearhead gender equality project in Malaysia. UNDP has always been a great support in providing strong partnership with the Ministry towards inclusive development.

Women in Decision-Making

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. It is a known fact that women have always played a key role in the development of the country. With the population size of 26.6 million and the females accounting for 49.1 per cent of the total population, women are recognised as an important component of the labour supply in Malaysia.

6. Nevertheless, the female labour force participation rate in Malaysia, which is 46.4 per cent in 2007, is rather low compared to our neighbouring countries such as Singapore (56.7%) and Thailand (71.4%). Likewise, the figure also pales in comparison with developed countries like Japan (61.3%), USA (69.3%) and Sweden (77.7%).

7. In addition, only 3.8 million women in Malaysia were employed in 2007, which made up only 35.9 per cent of the total labour force. Such dismal picture of women's participation in the labour market

entails a gloomier picture for participation of women at decision-making levels.

8. Women are still under-represented in all spheres of power in the country. This remains a major challenge towards the empowerment of women. More importantly, women's representation and participation must be recognised as an asset for a nation to be competitive in the face of globalisation.

9. Therefore, while women in Malaysia have come a long way, there is still great concern over the issue of low representation of women in decision-making positions that need to be critically addressed. For instance, in politics, Malaysian women were given with the right to vote since 1957 while women candidates were permitted to stand for election since the first general election in 1959. Nonetheless, the number of female candidates elected to Parliament increased moderately from 2.9 per cent in the 1959 elections to 10.8 per cent in the recent elections in March 2008. The number of women elected to the various State Assemblies also increased gradually from a mere 2.7 per cent in 1986 to 8.0 per cent in 2008. The number of female representatives in the Upper House, however, decreased from 33.3 per cent in 2004 to 26.7 per cent as of 26 March 2008.

10. To accelerate progress towards gender balance in decision-making, the Government in August 2004, adopted the policy of at least 30 per cent of the decision-making positions in the public sector be held by women. Since then, there has been a positive

advancement towards achieving the policy target as women in the top management positions in the public sector has increased from 18.8 per cent in 2004 to 37.5 per cent in 2008. This shows the commitment of the Government in leading by example to promote women's advancement at the decision-making level.

11. In the corporate sector, women's participation at the decision-making level is still pitiful in terms of facts and figures. The percentage of women who are members of the board of directors continued to decline from 9.9 per cent in 2004 to 5.3 per cent in 2007. However, women who hold the positions of general manager to president or CEO of companies have increased gradually from 13.5 per cent in 2004 to 24.0 per cent in 2007.

12. In the legal sector, we are fortunate to have an almost equal number of male and female lawyers in Malaysia with 46.3% of registered female lawyers in the country. However, the number of female judges is still lagging behind. Only three out of 20 judges of the Court of Appeal are women and none of the women judges are appointed as Judges of the Federal Court or above. At the High Court level, only 13 out of 48 judges and five out of 16 judicial commissioners are women.

Plan of Action Towards Achieving At Least 30% Participation of Women at Decision-Making Levels

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. The Beijing Platform for Action endorsed by the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995 includes a strong statement calling for governments to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. It also called for governments to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

14. Thirteen years after the Beijing Platform for Action, the figures sadly indicate that progress to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions in Malaysia is generally slow and limited, and more concerted efforts are needed to address the persistent imbalance. Although men continue to predominate in key positions in all areas, the gender imbalance remains greatest in the political arena where men still account for almost 90 per cent of the elected positions.

15. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in cooperation with the UNDP has embarked on this project to formulate a plan of action towards at least 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making levels. Gender equality through representation and participation is a fundamental right, and a necessary condition for achieving Malaysia's objectives of

economic growth and social cohesion. Equal participation of women and men in decision-making symbolises the level of maturity and judiciousness of societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. We cannot deny the fact that women's contribution to the country's development has increased significantly. However, women definitely can do a lot more. All they need is the opportunity and the right environment.

17. For this to happen, firstly, women need to be more closely integrated into the process of setting national goals and aspirations. This means continuous dialogues and consultations. I believe dialogues and partnering are the only way in which to ensure that an effective action agenda to increase women's participation in development takes into account the specific realities faced by women.

18. Secondly, there needs to be a much greater level of awareness among both women and men, about the issues concerning diversity and inclusiveness in the society as a whole, including the workplace. We must take into consideration the exponential benefits of real collaboration and partnering and the need for intervention to inculcate the right mindsets, particularly in our young people. Thus, we need to educate all the stakeholders such as leadership in the politics, the

public sector, the corporate sector, and the judiciary to have a positive perspective on gender issues.

Conclusions

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. As we are aware, once a woman's status as a mother becomes salient, she may begin to be perceived as a low-competence caregiver rather than as a high-competence professional. Thus, women may find their competence being questioned due to having children and taking care of the family.

20. In this regard, studies suggest that employers may make irrational business decisions about competence and commitment due to gender-based assumptions. When gender questions become prominent, a woman may be seen to be too feminine that could impede her performance in a job that is perceived as being highly masculine. The masculinisation of occupations and workplace, along with the assumptions surrounding motherhood, lead to situations in which women are considered unsuitable or incompetent for higher positions.

21. Besides facing all the unfavourable perceptions, women also encounter institutionalised patterns of stereotyping associated with motherhood, which is often compounded by the kinds of glass ceiling biasness that creates disadvantages to women in general. For these

reasons, work-family issues must be viewed through the unbiased lens of gender. I believe this is what the Ministry has been doing by taking small but steady and significant steps towards creating an environment that encourages women to use their talents and time productively for the national well-being.

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. Despite the long-standing recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate fully in society, in practice the gap between de jure and de facto equality in the area of decision-making remains wide. Women are largely excluded from participating at decision-making levels although there has been some progress. The global snapshot of the women in power and decision-making indicates that women only account for a world average of 15 per cent of members of national parliaments. Although this represents a certain progress, it is still far from the 30 per cent seen as a critical mass required to ensure that interest of women are fully taken into account.

23. Towards this end, your valuable contributions are essential in ensuring that the Plan of Action Towards Achieving at Least 30% Participation of Women at Decision-Making Levels effectively tackles the issues, which impedes women's progress especially at the decision-making levels. As the chosen one, both experts and practitioners, I believe your support will be the alchemy for the Plan of Action to succeed.

24. In relation to that, the Ministry would like to extend its sincere appreciation to Puan Daratul Baida Osman Khairuddin and her officers at UNDP for the commitment given to materialise this Project. All along, the Ministry and the UNDP have established smart partnership in mobilising our resources to deliver specific interventions with the ultimate result of achieving gender equality. Therefore, we look forward to many more projects to come with UNDP.

25. On that note, I again thank you for giving us your precious time and I hope that we will have a very fruitful workshop.

Ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat, Y. Bhg. Datuk-datuk, Datin-datin, puan-puan dan tuan-tuan

Dengan lafaz Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, sukacita saya merasmikan Bengkel Ke Arah Mencapai Dasar Sekurang-kurangnya 30 Peratus Wanita di Peringkat Pembuat Keputusan.

Sekian, terima kasih.