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Opening Remarks

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

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Dato' Param Cumaraswamy,
Member of the Regional Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism,
Former President of the Malaysian Bar,
Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers,

Ms. Judith Loh-Koh, President of AWAM

Mr. David Anthony from MAN.V

Ms. Gaye Phillips, Representative, UNICEF Malaysia and Special Representative to the Republic of Singapore & Brunei Darussalam

Celebrity performers and attendees, young representatives, members of the media, members of AWAM, MAN.V, UN colleagues

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Selamat pagi dan salam sejahtera kepada para hadirin sekalian. Good morning to all.

Violence against women and girls is a major human rights and public health concern. Every girl and woman should have the right to live in a home free from fear and the threat of violence. Every girl should be able to attend school without the risk of abuse. Every girl and woman should be free from gender-based violence.

The term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Today, as we commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we pay tribute to women and men across the globe who are bringing the often hidden subject of gender-based violence, to the fore. We acknowledge the governments and parliaments that have enacted legislation. To date 89 governments have legislative provisions that specifically address domestic violence; marital rape may be prosecuted in at least 104 countries; 90 governments have some form of legislative provision against sexual harassment, and 93 nations have legal provisions against human trafficking.

Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence. Data from various countries reveal the shocking facts that more than one third of women suffer physical violence at the hands of their male partners at some point during their lives, and about half suffer emotional abuse. Moreover, up to 20 per cent of women are the targets of sexual violence in one form or another.

Other forms of violence against women, such as forced prostitution, trafficking for sex and sex tourism appear to be growing problems. Each year, an estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across borders – 80 per cent of them women and girls. Most of them end up in the commercial sex trade. This figure does not include the substantial number of women and girls who are bought and sold within their own countries, for which there are scant data.

The *United Nations Secretary-General* study “*Ending Violence Against Women: from Words to Action*” pointed to the urgent need to strengthen the information-base for policy and strategy development on issues that will reduce violence against women. At present there are huge gaps in our knowledge of the dimensions of physical, sexual and psychological violence against girls and women. There is a need both to strengthen reporting systems and the gender sensitivity of those entrusted to collect the information.

Gender-based violence often affects the poorest girls and women the most. They are often exploited by men and have their rights denied. And they often lack access to information and services, especially sexual and reproductive health services.

The UN is proud to join the 16 day of activism to help end violence against women. We are working with partners to end impunity, to promote and protect the rights of girls and women, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, and to foster equal opportunity, participation and decision-making.

To help support this challenge, UN Malaysia has partnered with AWAM and MAN.V and other agencies to address gender-based violence. We encourage men, not just women, to be actively involved in awareness raising activities on violence against women.

Violence against women must be given greater priority at all levels – it has not yet received the priority required to enable significant change. Leadership is critical. Much can be achieved if there is political will. There is also a need for considerable investment of resources. And there is a need for a more cohesive and strategic approach from all actors, including governments, the international community and civil society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to commend MAN.V and AWAM for their good initiative and efforts in organizing the White Ribbon Campaign. I sincerely hope that it helps in eliminating violence against women.

I wish you every success for this campaign. Thank you.