



13 June 2011

STATEMENT OF CONCERN

THE SPREAD OF CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS THAT REINFORCE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN ASEAN

THE CASE OF THE OBEDIENT WIVES' CLUB OF MALAYSIA

To :

ASEAN Government Leaders

Government Representatives of ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights Representatives

ASEAN Commission for the Protection of Women and Children

The ASEAN Council of Permanent Representatives

The ASEAN Progressive Muslim Movement (APMM), a network of twenty one (21) non-governmental organizations working for the protection and promotion of women's rights in the ASEAN region, wants a firm and unequivocal guarantees from ASEAN Member States and Human Rights representatives that no cultural or religious justifications will be invoked by its member States to obstruct the advancement of the rights of women, their attainment of their well-being and their human development to their fullest potential

We ask for these statements from ASEAN Member States and Government Human Rights Representatives as we are deeply troubled by the current silence despite the widespread publicity on the outrageous claims made by The Obedient Wives' Club (OWC) in Malaysia. It needs to be noted that the OWC Club is an initiative of the controversial Islamic group, the Global Ikhwan group, a multi-national conglomerate formed by ex-members of the banned Al-Arqam group.

APMM feels that it would be an oversight to dismiss The OWC Club as just a throwback to medieval times and belittle the impact on men and women. The Club's aims to "teach women to be submissive and keep their spouses happy in the bedroom as a cure to social ills" is reductive and pushes men and women back into stereotypical roles. APMM also asserts that the use of Islam, in this instance, to justify the Club's call for women to become "obedient wives" is a misrepresentation of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed which enjoins women and men to conduct their marriages on the basis of mutual co-operation. We say that this is a distortion of the concept of "nusyuz" as disobedience applies to both women and men.

APMM believes in the principles of democracy and recognizes that an organization such as The Obedience Club can exist in our midst. But what APMM hopes to hear soon from the Human Rights government representatives in ASEAN and State Leaders is their commitment to advancing women's rights, to harnessing the potential of women in ASEAN, to enabling the human development of the women in ASEAN barring any conditionality based on cultural or religious excuses. It is important for ASEAN to send this signal clearly to its member States.

THE APMM would like to remind the ASEAN of its reaffirmation of the importance of the CEDAW as a guiding framework of the 1988 Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), the outcome of the Twenty Third Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 2000, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000, the 2004 Bangkok Communiqué adopted at the UNESCAP Regional Review of the BPFA and the 2004 ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in ASEAN during the ASEAN High-Level Meeting on Good Practices in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Reporting and Follow-up on 14-15 January 2008 in Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic. The implementation of these important documents has contributed to the implementation of the ASEAN vision 2020 and the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter.

We note that the ASEAN Member States are also committed to the principles of the ASEAN Charter (Article 1.7) and since 1988 to the terms of the ASEAN Declaration for the Advancement of Women which all reiterate ASEAN's commitment to developing the potential of women and to ensuring the equitable and effective participation of women in all fields and at various levels of the political, economic, social and cultural life of society at the national, regional and international levels.

We therefore ask the **ASEAN Member States and the government human rights representatives**

- To reaffirm its adherence to normative standards of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in international human rights law, especially through CEDAW.
- To take actions to eliminate cultural and religious norms that perpetuate discrimination against women and enhance gender stereotyping of men and women and to discontinue using the concepts of cultural diversity, pluralism and the notion of ASEAN values that undermine internationally agreed human rights standards which member –states of ASEAN are parties to.
- **To commit to the principles of gender equality and justice as foundations of the region's Muslim family laws.**
- To take up the recommendation from the Sixteenth Human Rights Council session (A/HRC/16/37) and develop spaces for dialogues as a two-way process to facilitate a cross-fertilization of ideas and to offer opportunities to increase understanding of perspectives linked to traditional values that present serious challenges to human rights.

We welcome an open and healthy public debate on Islam and women's rights within the family to be initiated by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights Representatives AND the ASEAN Commission for the Protection of Women and Children

Sincerely Yours



Sri Wlyanti Eddyono

The Convenor



The ASEAN Progressive Muslim Movement

Secretariate: Jl.Masjid Al-Ridwan No.39D RT.06/RW.09, Jakarta Selatan 12540
Telp/Fax: 021-7815679 Email: aseanprogressivemuslimmovement@gmail.com

- Convenor (Sri Wiyanti Eddyono): +61-416105033; Email: iyksiom@gmail.com
- Alternate Convenor (Indry Oktaviani) +62 8151878273; Email: indryoktaviani@scn-crest.org
- Indonesia Focal Point (Evi Zain); [+628126937277](tel:+628126937277) Email: evi.zain@koalisi-ham.org
- Malaysia Focal Point (Ratna Osman): +60-172640603'; Email: ratnaosman@gmail.com
- Philippines Focal Point (Yasmin Buslao): +63-9178075748; Email: yasminlao2004@yahoo.com
- Singapore Focal Point (Halijah Mohammad): +65-96177547; Email: halijah@halijahmohd.com.sg
- Thailand Focal Point (Angkhana): Email: angkhana_nee@hotmail.com