

A women's manifesto to protect gender and minority rights

Tuesday 13 March 2018, by [JIN Cheong Wey](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2018).

A coalition of civil society organisations and individuals launched the women's manifesto yesterday to demand current MPs and potential candidates for the 14th general election (GE14) to endorse and champion the agenda of women in the coming election.

'Why a women's manifesto?' is a question many people ask, said Angela M Kuga, the executive director of Empower.

"Some even ask if we are planning to contest (in GE14)," she said.

Numerous civil society organisations working on gender equality and women's rights issues throughout the years had begun to realise that the problems which arose were rooted within the system itself, which was in need of a fundamental change.

"We may not be political candidates, but we definitely want to see changes brought about in Malaysia," Angela stressed during the launch of the manifesto.

Ten key agendas

This document includes 10 key agendas on the critical issues that have been faced by women and different minority groups, such as the LGBTQs (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer).

1. Sustainable, inclusive and people-centred development
2. Good governance and participatory democracy
3. Sexual and gender-based violence and harassment
4. Human rights education
5. Health, bodily autonomy and well-being
6. The judiciary and equality in the law
7. Displacement, migration and foreign spouses
8. Employment and work conditions
9. Safe and non-discriminatory educational environment
10. Culture and religion

The manifesto was launched yesterday while celebrating International Women's Day at Gerakbudaya, with approximately 60 participants from NGOs and political parties who support the cause.

The manifesto also underlined the importance of strengthening women's roles in Parliament by institutionalising the Women's Parliamentary Caucus as a Select Committee on Women and Equalities.

Additionally, it proposed to amend the Election Act in order to address sexual harassment and

violence against women, to make a provision for additional women-only seats and to mandate parties to nominate a minimum of 30 percent of women at state and federal level elections.

To effectively address sexual and gender-based violence and harassment, one way mooted was to enact a Gender Equality Act, Sexual Harassment Act and other related regulations to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, regardless of their nationalities.

The manifesto was mainly researched and coordinated by Empower, with the joint efforts of the various women's rights movements in Malaysia such as All Women's Action Society (Awam), Jag (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality), G-Blog, Sisters in Islam and Women's Aid Organisation (WAO).

Approaching potential MPs

Angela told *Malaysiakini* after the launch that the group would approach potential political candidates and women MPs to endorse the manifesto.

Moreover, some progressive male MPs will also be targeted to lend their support.

"We will contact women MPs from different parties, and also some progressive male MPs, such as Amanah's Khalid Samad (Shah Alam), DAP's Charles Santiago (Klang) and PKR's R Sivarasa (Subang)," she said.

She explained that the group would act as a watchdog to supervise whether the elected representatives adhere to the manifesto's agenda after the election.

90s agenda still relevant today

The group also stated that the first manifesto was produced during the 1990 general election.

Nine years later, civil society groups launched the Women's Agenda for Change (WAC) on May 23, 1999, and a total of 76 civil society organisations endorsed it.

The group stressed that "many demands made in 1990 and 1999 are still relevant today", for issues such as holistic sex education programmes, sexual harassment and misogyny are yet to be resolved.

Cheong Wey Jin

P.S.

Among the 43 signatories of the joint statement are Awam, Sisters In Islam, Women's Aid Organisation, Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor and Empower. Civil society organisations and individuals are still welcome to endorse the manifesto.

<http://www.manifestowanita.empowermalaysia.org/endorsements>

Details of the manifesto can be found on their website.

<http://www.manifestowanita.empowermalaysia.org/our-demands>

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<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/415054>