

Malaysia: PAS attempt to sideline SIS a dangerous move, says PJ MP

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Petaling Jaya MP Maria Chin Abdullah has ticked off PAS for pushing its own agenda on the issue of the government allocating funds to Sisters In Islam (SIS).

Maria said PAS Rantau Panjang MP Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff's remark was "nothing more than an attempt by PAS to nudge the government towards the selective and preferential distribution of funds based on religious and ideological beliefs."

This is dangerous, she warned, as it casts a religious light on government allocations.

"In the new Malaysia, we should rise above differences and extend our humanity and compassion to those who need our assistance.

"We must not be blinded by our differences and instead protect and stand up for the marginalised, infirm, poor, those with disabilities, discriminated, beaten and struggling," she said in a statement today.

On Thursday, Siti Zailah had questioned Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Ministry Minister Hannah Yeoh over an RM20,000 [allocation](#) to SIS.

Siti Zailah brought up [fatwas](#) issued by the Islamic affairs departments of several states that declared the NGO a "deviant group."

In an immediate response, Yeoh had said her ministry provided funding to SIS on the basis it had done a lot to provide legal assistance to women.

Don't demonise

Maria said in her statement that PAS must stop demonising SIS, and focus instead on the work that it does.

"Ministry funds must be nonpartisan. SIS clearly fits the criteria set by the ministry which includes improving women's welfare and advocating for human rights," she said.

"Moreover, the NGO has checks and balances in its financial management that makes it transparent and accountable.

"It is high time that PAS starts placing more importance on understanding the welfare work that SIS does and not demonise the organisation."

According to Maria, SIS has been advocating for equal rights in Malaysia for many years while its free legal clinic, Telenisa, has assisted 8,400 people since 2003 in matters of Islamic family law and syariah criminal offences.

“This involves cases related to divorces, polygamy cases, child custody, and property,” she said.

“Without organisations like SIS, these marginalised women might not be able to receive the support they need and will end up defenceless.

“PAS should realise that such attacks will only hurt those who have nowhere else to turn to.”

Fighting for women’s rights

Meanwhile, the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) said in a statement that Siti Zailah should educate herself on the long history of SIS’ work fighting to uphold the human rights of women.

The group urged the PAS lawmaker to speak with thousands of Muslim women on the ground, whose rights to gender equality and non-discrimination SIS has stridently fought for.

It also deemed Siti Zailah’s call for the government to act against SIS as “highly irresponsible in dismissing freedom of individuals and organisations to express their religious beliefs in diverse ways.”

“JAG would like to urge Siti Zailah and the Parliamentary Select Committee on Rights and Gender Equality members to engage with civil society to be a part of the solution for the rakyat.

“Let’s practice a mature democracy and, together, roll our sleeves up to address the lived realities of communities on the ground and abandon political posturing,” its statement read.

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