

# **Sexism has no place in a changing Malaysia - Shame on Mohd Imran Abd Hamid**

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**Inequality, discrimination and disadvantages that women and girls face within their family and society are neither natural nor Islamic.**

SHAME on Mohd Imran Abd Hamid.

In 2015 he condemned athletes for wearing sexy and arousing clothes and mixing freely with the opposite sex as this could lead to adultery, he claimed.

Now he calls for a sexual harassment law to protect men from women whose actions, words and clothing could seduce men to commit incest, rape, molestation or watch pornography.

What world does this former Lumut MP, a former Admiral and now a PKR Senator live in? What company does he keep? What books does he read?

His obsession with seeing women as nothing more than sex objects and men as nothing more than an empty barrel of unbridled lust is an insult to God's creation.

His inability to understand or even notice how much the world has changed, how much Malaysia has changed, how much women, men and family lives today have changed, is downright appalling.

Everywhere in the world the idea that men are in charge, that they are superior to women, that they must be obeyed - is being questioned. Not just by activists and women's rights groups but by ordinary women whose day-to-day realities are no longer supported by the traditional structures and concepts upheld over the centuries.

Yet, attempts to keep women down, to silence and punish them for speaking up continues.

In some cases, discrimination against women has deepened.

In Muslim contexts, some men use religion to justify their sexism and misogyny.

They wilfully ignore that the Quran speaks of love and compassion in the relationship between women and men, that men and women are like each other's garments; that they are each other's *awliyya* - protecting friends and guardians - and the obligations for both men and women, to enjoy what is just and forbid what is evil, and they will be equally rewarded.

Why can't the beauty and message of justice and equality in the Quran be the source of law, policy and practice in the Muslim world?

Who decided that a few verses read out of context to justify male superiority and control over women be the source of law, while messages of mutual love and compassion be ignored?

Is it any wonder that when a man in authority, such as this PKR senator, feels no shame in displaying his misogyny in Parliament, that until today much of the Muslim world remains at the bottom of gender equality surveys?

The continued discrimination and inequality of women in the public sphere is a reflection of what happens in the private sphere of family.

The 2019 UN Women flagship report on Progress of the World's Women: Families in a Changing World, makes for compelling reading with its stark recognition of families as a contradictory space for women and girls.

Families as an institution is where both cooperation (solidarity and love) and conflict (inequality and violence) coexist.

It states that families can be places of love and affection, and pivotal for each member's sense of identity and belonging. However, within families, women and girls too often face violence and discrimination.

Over their lifetimes, about one in three women can expect to experience physical or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner.

A 2018 UN Office on Drugs and Crime global study on gender-related killing of women and girls found that 58% of women intentionally killed in 2017 were killed by a current or former intimate partner or a close family member because of their role and status as women.

It is a grim reality that home is not necessarily a safe place for women.

The report also identifies the urgent challenge for policy makers, activists and everyone to transform families into a home for equality and justice, a place where women and girls can exercise voice and agency, and where they have economic security and physical safety.

An important step is to define family by values, not by rights or identity. The values of love, care, support, affection, protection, respect, sense of home and belonging are critical to individual well-being.

Who in their right minds would pronounce these values as harmful to the family? Or against the teachings of Islam?

And yet, until today, many family laws ascribe rights and responsibilities based on whether you are a man or a woman, and the gendered roles expected, no matter what the realities on the ground are.

The perpetuation of such family laws constructed centuries ago based on a different time and circumstance is posing a crisis to family and societal well-being, not least in the Muslim world.

Thus the urgent necessity for law reform. The world is moving forward in defining families based on values that are fair and just to all members of this most important basic unity of society.

Unfortunately, much of the Muslim world remains stuck in a warped gender ideology that regards men as superior to women and accord them rights, privileges and entitlements that do not extend to women.

In Malaysia, law reform of the Marriage and Divorce Act granted women of other faiths equal rights to men. To promote family well-being, polygamy was banned, unilateral pronouncement of divorce

was banned, men and women enjoyed equal right to divorce.

Other laws were reformed as well to recognise that both parents have equal right to guardianship of their children, and women and men can inherit equally.

But these progressive law reform processes did not apply to the Muslim community.

It is disgraceful that we have men and women in power who believe until today that in the name of Islam, Muslim women should be discriminated against and Constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination can be applied to all categories of citizens, except Muslim women.

Inequality, discrimination and disadvantages that women and girls face in their family lives and relationships are neither natural, nor inevitable, nor Islamic.

For a society to flourish, families must be transformed from sites for inequality and discrimination to sites of mutual love, affection, belonging, support, justice, equality, and respect.

Under the Sustainable Development Goals, governments, including the Malaysian government, have agreed that violence and harmful practices against women and girls must be eliminated, women must have access to economic resources including through equal inheritance rights and equality in family laws; and men must share responsibility for the provision of unpaid care and domestic work, which falls disproportionately on women's shoulders.

But sexism and misogyny continue to get in the way.

Kate Manne, a philosopher writing on the logic of misogyny, defined sexism as an ideology, a set of beliefs, holding that it is natural, and therefore desirable, for men and women to perform "taking and giving roles" such as women providing sex, care and unpaid housework; while misogyny functions like a "police force", punishing women who deviate from them, and elevating women who advance patriarchal interests.

Recognition of this in-built unfairness and gross injustice is being felt everywhere. Many men today are beginning to realise that these traditional gendered roles and expectations are harmful not just to women, but also to men. Today's research on "toxic masculinity" show that the "masculine" ideology of suppressed emotions, dominance, aggression and the use of force, violence and control to get men's needs met are harmful to men's mental health and happiness.

In the age of #MeToo, more and more men are beginning to question patriarchy and how it crushes not just women, but them, too.

The public pillorying of Mohd Imran and the rejection of his depraved proposal, gives me hope that change is taking place, and assures me that all is not lost.

**Zainah Anwar**

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**P.S.**

• "Sexism has no place in a changing Malaysia". The Star, Sunday, 04 Aug 2019:  
<https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/columnists/sharing-the-nation/2019/08/04/sexism-has-no-place-i>

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<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.1610.6>

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