

The Women's Movement is the Key to Change

Saturday 1 November 2008, by [ARIANE Zely](#) (Date first published: 29 August 2008).

"... although legislation represents an important start, its role cannot be more than just a beginning. It is political reform that will continue to be sustainable and must be complimented by economic, social and cultural reforms — as a comprehensive approach for problems that are likewise comprehensive." (Sarah Wagner, in *Feminism Changes Society, the Women's Liberation Struggle in the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution*)

Zely Ariane — One more legal umbrella has been added for the advancement of women in Indonesia. Law Number 2/2008 on Political Parties, which bolsters the political opportunities for women to take part in thinking about the direction of the country and the advance of its people.

The broadening of space for gender mainstreaming has been realised, but it should not just be restricted to formal equality in political, professional and academic circles. It also demands the distribution of economic justice for women who are poor, dignified employment and improving knowledge, as well as affordable, easy and quality education so that women are no longer just become a reserve of votes in the name of women representation in politics.

The 30 percent figure is the minimum limit that has been agreed to internationally to promote women's representation in both parliament as well as public positions. The campaign for this quota is a form of the continuing struggle by women following the achievement of demands for women's right to vote in the early 20th Century.

The women's quota campaign aims to fight the domestication of women (fighting the politics of patriarchy) because domestication and male domination over women under a patriarchal society is not preordained. But this campaign will not be completed through women's representation in the political parties and parliament.

In principle, this figure should be increased to 50 percent, as is in effect in Cuba and Venezuela, which will be impossible to achieve if the state continues to maintain patriarchy as part of its political system and capitalism as its economic system.

As an example, the obstacles to the application of this quota in Indonesia will grow if scholarly interpretations of religious teachings are not developed and protected by the state, if illiteracy is high and if women's levels of education and healthcare remain low. This is the source of the low social capacity of women in Indonesia that must be overcome, rather than blaming women themselves.

Women are moving from an initial point that is not on an equal footing with men. Indonesian women have a higher rate of illiteracy than men and education levels that are lower than men. It is the mass political organisations that are capable of becoming a bridge to increase the awareness and political knowledge of the majority of women who are the victims of the feminization of poverty.

The women's movement

The success of the 1998 democracy movement has made an extraordinary contribution to the broadening of women's organisations. A new challenge is starting to emerge however — the spread of these organisations has not been followed by the broadening of the women's (political) movement. This situation is a consequence of the weak political position of women in the face of the state so it is extremely easy for women to be coopted by political means (particularly the political parties) that are not really struggling for women's liberation, but rather are only "serving up" women in their leadership structures as a means to increase their vote.

It is because of this therefore, that the development and the broadening of the women's movement is a key factor in bring about reform. There will be no reform for women without a women's movement. Universal suffrage was won by the first wave of feminism, including the winning of March 8 as International Women's Day, along with the economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights that were won by the second wave of feminism. The influence of the women's movement on

the advancement of women's equality in the world was huge. Without a movement there will be no progress, as we are experiencing at the moment.

In Indonesia, Kartini [1] has already laid the basis the concept of the women's struggle for liberation, but this concept was realised and advanced by the women's movement of the 1950s and the 1960s era. A number of advances related to the marriage law, such as the age limit for the marriage of women and men along with the freedom to determine one's life partner, are the results of women's movements such as Istri Sedar (Aware Wives), Gerakan Wanita Sedar (Women's Awareness Movement) and Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Gerwani, Indonesian Women's Movement). This is also the case with the Draft Anti-Pornography Law which was revised due to the widespread rejection by the movement.

It is because of this therefore, that formal gains, such as the birth of various laws that benefit women, must be seen as legal instruments that must be based in practice and in a consistent manner though pressure from the movement in order to provide the greatest possible benefit to overcoming the feminization of poverty.

P.S.

* From Kompas - September 29, 2008. Translated by James Balowski.

* Zely Ariane is the Director of Education and Literature with the Perempuan Mahardhika (Independent Women's) National Network, the spokesperson of the Peoples Democratic Party-Political Committee of the Poor (KPRM-PRD) and Hands Off Venezuela-Indonesia.

Footnotes

[1] Kartini was an Indonesian regent's daughter during the Dutch colonial period who, through her letters home, outlined her dreams of a better life for women. She died aged 25 a few days after giving birth to her first child. A variety of myths have made the original Kartini a nationalist hero and feminist symbol.