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NCWO-Women

SYARIAH COURT AND RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS NEED TO BE MORE SENSITIVE, SAYS NCWO

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 7 (Bernama) -- The National Council of Women's Organisation (NCWO) has proposed that Syariah Court and Islamic Religious Department officials undergo special courses to help them have a better perspective of problems faced by women.

The president of the Women Lawyers Association, Noor Farida Ariffin, said that this is among the proposals by the NCWO to be submitted in a memorandum to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad soon.

The association and another organisation, Sisters in Islam, are responsible for the draft of the memorandum.

Noor Farida said the NCWO felt that such courses were essential so that the officials concerned could deal with Islamic family cases more effectively.

The courses, which should be conducted as soon as possible, could also reduce gender bias, the main complaint among women who had to appear in court in family cases.

"Many women complained of not being treated fairly by those dealing with their cases like Syariah Court judges, counsellors and religious officials who appeared to undermine them," she told Bernama here.

"The problem is serious because it denies justice to Muslim women," she said.

Noor Farida said that the courses could be run by the Judicial and Legal Training Institute (Ilkap) and assistance could be provided by representatives of women's organisations.

The memorandum, entitled "Islamic Family Law Reform and the Administration of Justice in the Syariah System in Malaysia" was presented at a recent workshop on "Islamic Family Law Reform and Its Implementation and Administration" here.

According to the memorandum, even the best laws could not be effective if the officials concerned were not trained to appreciate the rationale behind any law reforms and to be sensitive to women's rights.

The NCWO also proposed that the Religious Departments and Syariah Courts provide trained counsellors who could advise couples with problems.

Another proposal is for the Religious Departments and Syariah Courts to emulate the civil courts in its organisational structure and to have adequate staff.

According to Noor Farida, among the obvious problems plaguing the administration of Islamic justice were the lengthy time taken to settle marital disputes and the laws which were implemented according to the personal views and interpretation of those involved.

Meanwhile, Federal Territory Islamic Religious Department Director Wan Mahmood Wan Yaacob said that his department only allowed group A religious officers to become counsellors.

"The officers will function according to their background, procedure and knowledge," he said.

Wan Mahmood welcomed the NCWO's proposal for courses to be conducted for those involved, saying that it would be useful to the officers.

On the allegation of delays in the settlement of cases, Wan Mahmood admitted such delays, especially in a situation where the department was short-staffed and the number of cases had increased.

-- BERNAMA

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