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Siti Hasmah-Women

UNITY VITAL IN UPLIFTING STATUS OF WOMEN- SITI HASMAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- With women making up over 900 million of the world's absolute poor, the time has come for the Muslim world to unite in their crusade to improve the status of women, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali said today.

The Prime Minister's wife said that with the poverty of women in the world on the increase, unity was vital "as together we can advocate and promote ways and means to alleviate and help overcome many of the problems and issues that concern women and children."

Calling on them to promote peace and understanding and goodwill among the Ummah, she said they could no longer isolate themselves from each other as the world becomes smaller through better and sophisticated means of transport and communication.

"We cannot help but sympathise with those countries amongst us that are less fortunate in terms of political and socio-economic stability, she said in her speech at the Micro-Credit Workshop in Tehran today.

The text of her speech was faxed to Bernama.

The workshop is being attended by the wives or first ladies of the heads of state/government attending the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Iran. Siti Hasmah is accompanying Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the summit.

Siti Hasmah told her audience that "there are many amongst our Muslim sisters who are not as fortunate as we, who, as a result of natural disasters, the scourge of war and diseases and the socio-economic instability in their country live in abject poverty."

"We cannot just stand and watch the plight of our sisters and their families," she said.

To-date, statistics showed that out of 1.3 billion absolute poor living on less than US\$1 a day, over half a billion are living in Asia, she said.

Siti Hasmah said it was imperative that governments and non-governmental organisations take stock of the conditions of their rural women and initiate assistance with the micro-credit system programme.

She said Malaysia's micro-credit programme initiated by a micro-finance institution called Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) had been a success with 37 branches formed throughout the country as of last August.

The 47,783-member AIM made up of 100 per cent rural women managed to disburse a cumulative amount of US\$64 million (about RM230 million) with an excellent repayment rate of 99.5 per cent, she said.

"The profound impact of the micro-credit system on the poor families is impressive. It does not only assist in the need for investment and be self-employed, but it also gives the women borrowers a sense of achievement, increased self-confidence, self-esteem and respect," she added. --BERNAMA

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