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Women seek role in promotion of human rights

Muharyani Othman

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Women want 30 per cent representation in the National Human Rights Commission which will be set up to promote human rights in the country.

The National Council of Women's Organisations Malaysia, which represents 87 bodies, will be requesting this in a letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This follows the call by several non-governmental organisations at the two-day seminar "Confronting the New Millennium: The Women's Perspective" which ended today.

The call is in line with Malaysian women's goal of having 30 per cent women at the decision-making levels by the turn of the century.

In its workshop session on women and socio-economic trends, the seminar, among other things, called on the Government to include NGOs, professional bodies and the public in any discussion on the privatisation and corporatisation of public health care.

It said the NGOs and other concerned groups should also push for the establishment of a national commission on health and another on housing to include representations from various sectors including NGOs.

Among the objectives of the housing commission would be to see that developers allocate "green lungs" in their housing projects, space and multi-ethnicity for low-cost housing, and ensure that the projects are senior citizens and disabled-friendly.

In view of the prevailing abuses against women and children, the participants urged the Government to see that laws affecting them are streamlined and enforcement strengthened.

On the issue of strengthening women's emerging roles in international fora, the participants called for affirmative commitment from the Government, NGOs and the private sector to promote gender-balanced participation.

They also voiced the need to build a critical mass of women with expertise, experience and exposure through training and attachment programmes with international organisations like the United Nations.

In identifying local resource on issues for participation at international fora, the seminar proposed the setting up of a data bank of women experts and a mechanism for utilising their expertise.

On gender equality in the political arena, one of the recommendations was the elimination of gender stereotyping and stigmatisation in family as well as formal education.

The participants also suggested identifying and promoting good role models, understanding politics and developing critical thinking through training programmes, and the setting up of a "politics watch" by NGOs to evaluate how well women politicians perform.

The seminar report with the recommendations will be submitted to the Prime Minister and the relevant ministries.

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