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Act, don't talk, women told

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Women's groups have been urged to study legislation discriminating against women and recommend action to the authorities. International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said today that they should not just engage in endless debate on the matter. "It is important that in Malaysia, women do not get into the groove of endlessly debating women's rights, even to the extent of using it as a political platform," she said at the "What Women Want" forum today. She said women in other countries did not get their due share even when they had the most vocal and eloquent of women's rights campaigners. Rafidah suggested the women's groups get together for a concerted effort in fighting for their cause and to organise educational talks for workers. She said they should organise talks every three or four weeks for government workers, especially the men, on issues of parenting and the roles of husbands to increase awareness of some women's problems. She said women activists needed to address more men in their forums to find better ways of solving issues together. Rafidah officiated at the forum, the first of its kind in Malaysia, which saw the participation of politicians, non-governmental organisations, the corporate sector, students and women from all walks of life.

The forum was for women to give voice to what they wish for themselves in society, and to draw up an action plan for the workshop's committee members and Marie Claire magazine to follow up.

Topics discussed, deemed to be most relevant to Malaysian women were political representation, financial independence, equality under the syariah law and women's rights.

Presenting the papers were Singapore MP Claire Chiang ("The Politics of Small Wins"), Sisters in Islam executive director Zainah Anwar ("Finding Liberation Within Faith"), DRB Hicom senior group director Datuk Maznah Jalil ("How Best to Manage Your Money") and Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir ("Right to Women's Health"). Others were Women's Development Collective executive director Maria Chin Abdullah, Equality Now co-executive director Monique Widyono ("Women Around the World") and Singapore MP Dr Kanwaljit Soin ("Women's Leadership in the Health Agenda").

Deputy minister in the Prime Minister Department Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who was supposed to present a paper on "Women in Politics", could not be present due to the death of an uncle.

The forum was organised by MI Publishing Sdn Bhd, Body Shop and Schandinsky.

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