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Women NGOs in dialogue with PM

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Ninety women non-governmental organisations are urging the Government to let women have a say in every aspect of the country's development through the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

They made this appeal today in a three-hour dialogue with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who is in charge of the Women's Affairs Department (Hawa) said the proposal was a way to promote gender sensitivity.

"Currently, the Malaysia Plan contains just one chapter on women's issues. Instead of this, we want every chapter of the Plan to include a subsection on women's perspectives. This will give women a say in all areas, whether youth and sports, agriculture or entrepreneurship," she told reporters later.

"We want this because we make up 50 per cent of the workforce," she said.

Shahrizat added that the Prime Minister appeared receptive to the proposal and believed he would study the matter.

Today's dialogue was held under the banner of the National Advisory Council for the Intergration of Women in Development (Naciwid) and Hawa's Consultative Council.

The dialogue is the first activity organised by Naciwid and Hawa to celebrate National Women's Day on Aug 25.

Sharizat said they also discussed "gender budgeting" where allocations for women entrepreneurs, for example, should be set aside as part of the yearly budget for entrepreneur development.

"By including women in the national budget, it will be easier to plan funding and programmes for them," she said, adding that she would also raise this up with the respective ministries.

Asked about the presence of Opposition-based NGOs, she said: "Everyone put aside their political ideologies and spoke on women's issues only."

National Council of Women's Organisations vice-president Professor Puan Sri Fatimah Hamid Don said the dialogue also touched on the family court system, the standardisation of the Syariah Courts and national education.

"We have a good set of Syariah laws but we want efficient implementation, such as expediency in dealing with family matters.

"For example, there should be a one-stop centre where once a divorce is legal, custody matters can also be settled immediately," she said.

However, Fatimah added that the dialogue could have been more focused.

"So many issues were raised. Some questions could have been better asked and time more wisely spent on the main issues. But since it was a free for all, we wanted people to speak freely."

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