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A stand against violence

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THE WOMEN and Family Development Ministry's inaugural project, Women Against Violence (WAVe), will give women an opportunity to take a stand. With a tagline of "I'm a woman. I make the difference", Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil hopes this effort would help end violence against the family.

The campaign, aimed at boosting public awareness, is intended to educate victims on the remedial actions they can take and guide caring citizens to offer their services to curb such violence.

At the launch of WAVe, Shahrizat said that while some groups had asked the Ministry to focus on violence against women, the scope of the Ministry's portfolio meant that fathers and children could not be ignored.

"We care that our men are being murdered, our children's throats being slit just as we care about our women being violated. We believe that women can and will make the difference, because they are the centre and strength, not only of the family, community and nation, but the world as well," she said.

She also said that women were often left on the fringes when dealing with specific issues and the Ministry felt that it was important that they were involved in the struggle against violence.

"We made the decision that women should be the driving force of the campaign. Women do not want violence to be a way of life and we felt that the campaign would allow them to express this voraciously."

In his speech before the launch of the campaign, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the rising wave of violence was due to changing lifestyles, with both parents working outside the home and not having enough time to instil in their children the necessary values.

He said working mothers needed to spend quality time with their children in order to sow the right values. "Once nurtured with these values, it would be natural for them to reject unhealthy activities.

"Unfortunately, a lot of children today are latch-key kids. They come home at will and because there is no one to monitor them, they can behave irresponsibly."

There would never be enough laws or police personnel to prevent violent acts if nothing was done to curb the problem at its source. This could only be done if parents made an effort to guide them.

Perhaps the most important development is a proposal to amend Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitution to include the word "sex". The Article currently reads: "Except as expressly authorised by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment."

The amendment, to be tabled during the current Parliament meeting, will enable women to enjoy equal rights as men and ensure they are not discriminated.

"This amendment is clearly a watershed decision and a great breakthrough for the women of Malaysia. When this amendment becomes law, the Constitution will specifically spell out that there shall be no discrimination by virtue of sex and this means a lot to the women of

Malaysia because usually, although not always of course, women are subject to dicrimination, either blatantly or implicitly," Shahrizat said in her speech, adding that this was a great stride forward for women.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said that the proposed amendment would help ensure the law and Government policies were not discriminatory towards women.

"The equal rights will concern laws and policies except for physical matters in which there are certain reasons why we need to differentiate between men and women," he said.

On whether existing laws involving women would be reviewed, Dr Mahathir said that if "there is a need, then we will look into them". He also said that the Government would consider a proposal to amend the laws with a view to imposing a stricter ruling on incest in view of its rising incidence.

"Women's groups could initiate a study and make proposals to us," he said.

NOTE: If you would like to do your part to stop violence, log on to www.wave.gov.my. For more information on the campaign, call 03-26930095.