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It's time to move on!

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WHEN I first heard the term "Women Against Violence" (WAVE), I was thrilled for two reasons - it was current, considering the intensity of violence these days. Secondly, it showed women as shouldering problems and not being the persistent problem itself.

I also remembered an incident some years ago when I visited my sister in Lahad Datu. Every evening, we could hear a woman screaming abuse at her husband while she battered him.

So, with the launching of the WAVE campaign last Monday, we have made a stand that we care for battered men and children, too. Unfortunately, some quarters were unhappy about WAVE and insisted on the "Violence against Women" banner. I write this for them.

Many of us do not want to be diagnosed as masochistic, battered victims. Although it is still premature for a celebration, we are just happy being re-defined as women who are making a stand for the nation, not just for ourselves. We want to move on.

Right now, we are filled with the popular notion that women are the victims. The aim for women now is to be humanly emancipated, taking ourselves in a direction appropriate for the 21st century.

The past is past.

We would like to tear down that bulletin of despair that has socially conditioned us to believe that we are a minority and forever the aggrieved because the danger of such conditioning has been to isolate us from the mainstream.

We have the experience of last century's mistakes and confusion about feminism to use as a guideline. Mistakes that isolated women because it seemed to stand for anti-establishment.

I believe we are past working from secret chambers. We are also tired of flagging our cause with anger and frustration. It is no more fashionable to be activists, leftists, revolutionists and others who crusade with outdated speeches in which the cause becomes somehow hidden and buried.

Frankly, I am just as concerned about violence against women. I, too, squirm when I see the bruises of the battered women seeking counselling. I am also aware that in the public agenda of men's seething ambitions, women's interests have been sidelined.

When you look at other indicators in the social barometer, there is a still a large number of us who have benefited from the system. We have gone through a non-discriminatory education system and have been employed based on merit. We have not been subjected to sexual prejudices or harassment. We have, in fact, enjoyed being women.

There is also a new wave of young independent, women who are working alongside men, with no memory of feminist revolutions.

These women want to be part of a larger humanist revolution, to be able to move things instead of lamenting over issues. We are fortunate that we have a channel to address the issues through the Women and Family Development Ministry. Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil has already had several meetings with the NGOs and it is up to them to participate from there.

Being a young nation, the sensible thing to do will be to work from within the system and shape a new movement that represents today's women.

We are confident that we will be treated just as any other citizen because if we do not consider ourselves a minority, no one else would

dare.

For Malaysian women, this is the historical year where we have been recognised as an integral part of the Government. This is the year women are being drafted in the Constitution and there is so much in the pipeline for us.

Last Monday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke about the amendment to Article 8(2) of the Constitution by inserting the word "sex" that applies to both men and women, showing there is no gender bias in the Constitution. Because of this, existing laws, which are sexually-discriminatory, are ultra-vires.

Activists, academicians, lawyers, NGOs and those who are interested in women's issues should use this opportunity to offer positive suggestions on how best to make this amendment effective.

We have come a long way. This is the year of recognition and we are more interested in finding solutions than concentrating on the problems themselves.

We are in a better position now than we were, even 10 years ago, and we want to use our new power to help make the world a better place. How do we make it right? How can we make it better? Not for women alone but for all of us because like Shahrizat says, "Women are making a stand."