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Women leaders welcome `their' Minister

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Women leaders and organisations welcomed the formation of the Womens' Affairs Ministry, saying it reflected the Government's seriousness towards problems faced by women.

They also congratulated Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil who was appointed a full minister.

Wanita Umno exco member and Penang Wanita Umno chief Sharifah Aminah Syed Mohamad said it was a timely move and something which womens' organisations have been asking for a long time.

"We are glad that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has granted our wish.

"Previously, womens' issues were handled by Womens' Affairs Department (Hawa) which was placed under the Prime Minister's Department.

"We are happy that it has now been given a separate entity.

"Shahrizat, being the Wanita Umno deputy head, is surely the right person to handle the ministry and we have full confidence that she would do a good job."

MIC Wanita secretary and Kota Raja State assemblywoman Kamala Ganapathy has urged women to make full use of the new ministry in addressing their problems.

"There are many issues faced by women and this ministry is the right venue for them to seek help when facing problems."

MCA Wanita chief Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen said the new ministry should include the needs of men in its scope, such as the issue of paternity leave.

"In this way, the ministry is also addressing the needs of working women," Ng said.

She said that other areas that needed attention included women and information technology and single mothers.

"The building of society cannot be left to men alone and in his wisdom, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has recognised that women are contributors."

Ng hoped the new ministry would be a sign of "more good things to come. There is still a big gap for women in decision-making".

Vice President of the National Council of Women's Organisations Prof Puan Seri Dr Fatimah Hamid Don said Shahrizat, as a full minister, would be in a better position to bring women's issues to the Cabinet.

"NCWO also hopes the new ministry will be able to ensure speedier implementation of several issues, such as the Family Court."

Fatimah said the NCWO had the confidence that Shahrizat would develop policies for the advancement of women at grassroots level.

"We have seen women appointed to high places, such as the Attorney-General recently. Now we must work for the masses."

Women's Aid Organisation executive secretary Ivy Josiah also congratulated Shahrizat and called the creation of the ministry an achievement for all women.

"The Cabinet has shown that it recognises the importance of women's issues."

Josiah urged Shahrizat to make the gender equality principle a "pervasive influence" in the policies and programmes of other ministries.

"The Women's Affairs Ministry should act as a central co-ordinating unit for policies that affect women. It should bring women's issues into the

mainstream."

Sisters in Islam founding member Sharifah Zuriah Al Jeffri hoped that giving full ministerial status to women's affairs was not a "token".

She also hoped that the new ministry would speed up the streamlining of Syariah laws to prevent delays in hearings and in receiving maintenance.

Sharifah also urged Sharizat to implement proposals made in the Women's Agenda for Change document.

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