

# NGOs' apathy costs them Govt financial aid

By **SIM LEOI LEOI**

KUALA LUMPUR: More than half of the over 600 non-governmental **organisations** (NGOs) championing women's issues in the country have not bothered to contact or inform the Government of their activities, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said.

This apathy, she said, had made it difficult for the ministry to compile a database on these **NGOs** or have a directory of their addresses and contact numbers.

"At present, the ministry only has the addresses of some 200 of them supplied by the National Council of Women Organisations.

"But we estimate that there are about 600 such **NGOs** and those in touch with us are the ones located in rural areas and others not affiliated to the NCWO," she said after witnessing the signing of memoranda of understanding between the ministry and six **NGOs** to receive grants totalling **RM309,760** at her office here yesterday.

Many of these **NGOs**, added Shahrizat, could also be those with a small membership and run by volunteers without much capabilities and expertise.

"Many of them are thus not aware that they can actually ask for funding and financial assistance from the ministry for their activities.

"Their failure to contact us or even inform us of their existence means they will lose out because we cannot call them up to offer funds for their activities," she pointed out.

For instance, Shahrizat said, she only knew of the existence of an NGO aimed at improving the lot of the wives of Felda settlers after meeting its representatives when campaigning at a recent by-election.

"When I first met them, I realised that I had never heard of their organisation. And it was carrying out activities which were very beneficial for women in Felda estates.

"The ministry depends on these groups to carry out **such** activities because it lacks the manpower and staff to reach women at grassroots level.

"So we ask them to contact us or our state committee and register themselves as our 'smart partners'. We hope to have a complete directory of their addresses before the end of the year," she said.

On the Women's Day celebrations this Sunday, Shahrizat said the theme would concentrate on their role in encouraging life-long learning and the mastering of skills in the information technology era.

"Many women are also wives and mothers. Similarly, we see that the teaching profession is dominated by women. So they can all play an important role in emphasising the importance of education and learning among their children and students," she said.

This year's celebrations, which will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Stadium Putra in Bukit Jalil, will be attended by about 12,000 participants from various women **NGOs** in the country.