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OIC-Dialogue

FIRST LADIES WANT A SECRETARIAT TO DEAL WITH WOMEN ISSUES

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- The first ladies of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) have called for the establishment of a permanent secretariat within the organisation to deal with women issues.

Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today the secretariat could assist member countries to take follow-up actions on issues pertaining to women and children.

"Women do not constitute a minority and they play a fundamental role in the generation and application of knowledge in various aspects of development.

"Women have played an important role in Muslim cultural life and many women Muslim scholars preceded the advancement of women in other civilisations. If we oppress the women, it means we are halving the resources for the development," she said.

Women could not only forcefully articulate their views on equality in Islam, development and peace-building on the national and international stages but also actively participate in these efforts, she said when announcing a 10-point resolution adopted at the inaugural First Ladies OIC Dialogue, here.

The dialogue on "Women, Peace and Development", organised by the Women Affairs and Family Development Ministry, was held in conjunction with the 10th OIC Summit in Putrajaya.

Chaired by Dr Siti Hasmah, it was participated by the first ladies of Pakistan, Turkey, Gabon and Sudan as well as the wives of cabinet ministers and foreign diplomats stationed here, and women activists.

Dr Siti Hasmah said that although only a small number of first ladies were present in Malaysia out of the 57 OIC member countries, the dialogue was successful in providing a platform for women to air their views and share their experiences.

"This is our first...if we get five, that's good enough. We have been patient all this while. Always begin with a small step and then you can run amok," she said.

She said that with the Muslim nations facing low levels of progress in human development, the OIC member states must take steps to secure peace and to provide opportunities and choices for women to participate in the development and the dialogue hoped to jumpstart this process.

Dr Siti Hasmah hoped that besides having dialogues, the first ladies could also visit each other's countries to see the problems faced and addressed.

She also wanted it to become an activity under the OIC.

Pakistani First Lady Sehba Musharraf said she was "keeping her fingers crossed" that the organisation would accept all the points contained in the resolution.

"Women are always a marginalised community, even in our part of the world. Certainly I hope some movement will take place in establishing initiatives and seeing them implemented. That's very essential," she said.

Iranian woman activist Fatimah Hashemi Rafsanjani said Islam gave women equal rights but due to the misunderstanding of Islam and some cultural practices, many did not see the real truth of the religion.

"Muslim women should do whatever they want themselves instead of asking others to fight for them," said the 43-year-old daughter of the former

Iranian president.

She was the one who came up with the idea of having a separate forum on women issues in conjunction with the OIC summit.

She suggested it to Dr Mahathir in Qatar in 2001 upon hearing that Malaysia was to become the 10th chair of the OIC.

-- BERNAMA

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