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NGOs to have a say on law on sexual violence

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Non-governmental organisations will have a say on the amendments to the law on sexual violence before they are tabled in Parliament.

They will be asked to give their input after a draft of the amendments has been prepared by the Attorney-General's Chambers and other government agencies.

This is the first time that NGOs are being given the chance to shape legislation at such a late stage in the law-making process.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced this move at a dialogue with NGOs today.

He said he had directed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Legal Affairs) Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad and Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil to meet NGOs after amendments were made.

"That way, the amendments will truly take into account the concerns of the people through the NGOs," he said.

The draft amendments will cover a broad range of issues related to sexual violence, including punitive measures, broadening the definition of rape to include penetration by objects and the admission of evidence by child victims through video recording.

Representatives from women's organisations embraced Abdullah's statement today.

Ramani Gurusamy, deputy president of the National Council of Women's Organisations, said: "This is a great thing for NGOs. It's very significant because it's the first time the Government is willing to get public opinion on a Bill before it becomes an Act."

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Marina Mahathir said: "The final form (of the amendments) has to be acceptable. If it gets passed through Parliament and something is wrong with it, then it's very hard to change. But now we get to provide input at other stages, which is a very new thing."

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