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KL to hold inaugural First Ladies dialogue

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THE 10th OIC Summit will witness the inaugural First Ladies dialogue, a reflection of the increasing role played by women in the 57-member organisation.

An idea mooted by Malaysia, the event will see wives of Presidents and Prime Ministers engage in brain-storming sessions.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, said the dialogue themed "Women: Peace and Development" would address the many issues affecting women in Islamic countries.

Dr Siti Hasmah, who will chair the session, said it was important that problems affecting women in these countries be identified and addressed.

"We read about the problems they are facing daily, but we still have doubts if the stories are true. The dialogue will provide everyone the opportunity to get a first-hand account of what is really happening," she said, adding that feedback and ideas emerging from the dialogue would be collated and documented for follow-up action.

Dr Siti Hasmah was speaking at a Press conference at Seri Perdana in Putrajaya.

Asked about the absence of spouses of Arab leaders on the list drawn up for the dialogue, she said invitations had been sent out and Malaysia was hopeful that they would be able to accompany their husbands to the Summit.

To date, five First Ladies have confirmed their attendance. They are the wives of the Presidents of Gabon Edith Lucie Bongo, Zineb Yahya Jameh (Gambia), Sehba Musharraf (Pakistan), Widad Babikir Omer (Sudan) and Semra Sezer (Turkey).

Nane Annan, the wife of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, will also be present.

The session will also be attended by wives of foreign ministers and ambassadors, in addition to experts in several fields and representatives of non-governmental organisations.

Organised by the Women and Family Development Ministry, Dr Siti Hasmah said resolutions from the dialogue would be forwarded to the OIC Chairman for inclusion in the organisation's programmes.

Topics lined-up for the dialogue included education, women's health-care, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, the involvement of women in society, science and technology, poverty eradication, economic development and transfer of technologies.

There will also be proposals on policies to avoid war and terrorism.

Dr Siti Hasmah said the dialogue would also promote closer networking among women in Muslim nations.