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`Priority to single mums'

Farrah Naz Karim

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Single mothers must be given priority in State Governments' and local authorities' allocation of low-cost housing, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said today.

They should also be the first to be given the opportunity to buy Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd (SPNB) low medium-cost houses which come with a 20 per cent discount.

Calling on the authorities to expedite the implementation of the policies, Shahrizat said they must work on improving whatever mechanism that was applied in the allocation of the houses.

The ministry has been receiving numerous requests for affordable houses from single mothers.

"The number of single mothers is escalating and this is a worrying trend ... this group is in dire need of housing.

"The implementation of these policies and incentives would greatly help these women lead better lives, but there must be an effective system devised to execute the policies at the State level."

Shahrizat added that authorities must react positively and effectively to the special scheme announced by former Finance Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the tabling of the 2004 Budget.

It was announced that priority would be given to single mothers with an income of less than RM600 to own low-cost houses.

The Government gave an assurance that priority would be given to single mothers to buy low- and medium-cost houses from SPNB with a 20 per cent discount.

Shahrizat, who is also Kepong Wanita Umno chief, said this after joining division and community members in tadarus (group recitals of the Quran) here, today.

The ministry, she said, had been pushing for the well-being of this group to empower them. This included the establishment of a council for them to govern single mother associations nationwide.

The council, which has 17,000 registered single mothers, acts as an umbrella body to the many associations around the country and ensures that the Government acts promptly and smoothly to assist single mothers.

Since 2000, some 800,000 single mothers have registered with the ministry and the number is expected to have increased to over one million by now.