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Two recognised for contributions to women

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Former National Unity and Social Development Minister Tan Sri Zaleha Ismail and social activist and educationist F.R. Bhupalan were tonight conferred the Tun Fatimah Gold Medal award by the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) for their contributions to women in the country.

The duo received the recognition from Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah at a dinner held here in conjunction with the 41st Women's Day celebrations and the 40th anniversary of NCWO.

Zaleha, who is Gombak MP, was acknowledged for, among others, empowering women in her capacity as Cabinet member and the Asian Confederation of Women's Organisations' president, a post she held from 1998 to 2000.

She is also a former NCWO president.

Bhupalan, a former NCWO vice-president, received the award for her life-long pursuit to improve conditions for women and the less fortunate.

The 76-year-old founding president of the Women Teacher's Union is also a prominent figure in the teaching field and human rights movement, having fought for women's equality.

Concerned with the issue of rape, she asked for more stringent laws against rape and sexual abuse, pressed for the setting up of rape crisis centres at hospitals, and was instrumental in the equalpay issue for teachers in 1960.

Present at tonight's event were Raja Perempuan Besar of Perlis Tengku Budriah Tengku Ismail, Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, the wife of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and NCWO president Professor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin.

Shahrizat, in her speech, said NCWO had contributed significantly to the advancement of women in the country and played the pivotal role of an "incubator", producing many women who were instrumental in women's development.

"All this success brought about by NCWO is because they are committed and tireless in ensuring their aims were achieved for the betterment of women."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and Abdullah, in their messages in the souvenir booklet, also commended NCWO for its achievements and contributions to the country.

Dr Mahathir said the organisation, which has 115 women associations under its umbrella, was an important voice for the people.

"It is an important partner to the Government, helping tremendously in the formulation and execution of policies for the country's development," he said, adding that the organisation was one of the forces that had helped Malaysian women be where they were now.