

## **Empowering Women To Join Politics: More Substantive Moves, Less Window-Dressing**

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The MCA Youth annual general meeting is traditionally a male-dominated event. However, that tradition was challenged last weekend with the participation of a number of good-looking young female members which quickly caught the attention and focus of the media.

For political parties and NGOs, the emergence and active participation of youth wings comprising members from both sexes is an irreversible development. Women wings provide a platform for females to develop and express themselves in a male-dominated society. Once gender equality is achieved, the abolition of women's wing is just a matter of time. The reason for establishing separate women's branches or wings will become obsolete as women will be sufficiently capable of competing with men on the same platform.

The emergence of these female MCA youth members raised more than a few eyebrows as some quarters wondered if these attractive members were actually interested in politics hence their participation, or perhaps they were merely there for "window-dressing" purposes.

I prefer to view this development with optimism. After all, the perception that "pretty girls are not very smart" or that they are viewed as mere "window-dressing" accessories is a male prejudice against the fairer sex. One cannot simply accuse others of lacking in substance just because she is born pretty or has good grooming skills. After all, vanity is a natural instinct and grooming oneself to look pretty is a right.

However, the female participation in MCA's youth wing appears to be more symbolic in form rather than substantial in its application. If MCA wants to elevate the role and status of female members, a standing ovation during the MCA Youth AGM is not enough. Allowing actual female representation is the key. During the MCA Wanita annual general meeting, MCA Wanita chief Yu Chok Tow presented arguments for more female candidates to be fielded during the general election as their chances of winning were higher. Unfortunately, her request was shot down immediately by the MCA secretary General Kong Cho Ha.

According to the 2010 Global Gender Gap Report issued by the World Economic Forum, Iceland and 4 other Scandinavian countries occupied 5 of the top 10 places in the index. The main reason for the high ranking is that, in addition to a high rate of female participation in the job market and small gap in the gender pay scale, crucially, they have the highest female ratio in the political arena and senior levels of management, enabling them to advocate and implement policies that lead to gender equality.

In many nations, there are no longer gaps in opportunities for education and healthcare. In fact, in Malaysia, educated females consistently outnumber the males. However, female participation is still relatively low in economic and political activities. Out of the 134 countries in the report, Malaysia is ranked 98th overall but in the "Political Empowerment" category, Malaysia ranked a lowly 110 mainly because our female parliamentary ratio is merely 11% and the female Minister ratio is a miserable 7% .

I welcome the participation of more females in political activities no matter which political party they choose to join. Women are an indispensable component of harmonious households, but our august House need their voices too.

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