

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF SEMINAR OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AT MAKTAB PER-
GURUAN MALAYA ON 23RD AUGUST, 1964

Madam President¹, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to you, Madam President, and to the members of the National Council of Women's Organisations for inviting me to address your Seminar this evening. I must say it was with some hesitation that I agreed to accept your invitation to come here this evening. It is not easy for a man to have to face so many women, particularly in my case when I am only used to facing only one woman in my life and even then I never had the better or the last say in things.

However, since you so kindly invited me to speak and since I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and members of your Council personally for the support and cooperation that you have given this Government, I plucked some courage and decided to accept your invitation.

I should like, Madam President, to congratulate you and your National Council for the initiative they have taken in holding this Seminar. As you said, your Council is only one year old but this one year old child has already embarked on a Seminar which will discuss topics covering such a wide field as you have explained. A famous historian wrote some three hundred years ago "There is a woman at the beginning of all great things" and I am sure that the coming together of so many leaders of our women's organisations throughout the country to this Seminar will mean great things for our people and our country. I can assure you that whatever recommendations you may put forward as a result of your deliberations in this Seminar will be given the most careful consideration by the Government. It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction that since Independence our women in Malaya have come forward in all fields — development, social, administrative and even the defence of our country. Our young country certainly needs the energies, the force and the power that our women can give to it.

As you rightly said, Madam President, there is much that women and

¹ Datin Fatimah Hj. Hashim.

women's organisations can do for our people and our country. That is why I welcome your idea of holding this Seminar and I hope that you will hold a Seminar such as this more frequently in the future so that ideas and efforts by our women can be collated, coordinated and guided along the right lines. We in the Government will be pleased to hear considered views, particularly on matters affecting our women, from an organisation such as yours and also as a result of careful thought and discussion. Speaking as a man I do hope that discussions at your Seminar will only be confined to national and international affairs and not to "home affairs". Women will certainly resist if you decide to bend together to confront us and take away more of our rights and privileges. Madam President, as you said and as we all in this country realise, our women can play a great part in the economic, cultural and social progress of our nation. As you know the Government has implemented a gigantic Development Plan and has endeavoured to provide greater amenities of life to our people particularly those who live in the rural areas. Our Development Programme has brought changes throughout the country and anyone who visits this country can see the changes that are taking place in our kampongs, our villages, in our towns and our cities. But progress of any nation lies in the hearts and the minds of its people and it is in this aspect and in this call to action by the people in the development of our nation that the wonderful weapon of womanhood can be used with tremendous effect. A woman has a weapon which is more powerful than any which belong to the greatest armed forces of the world. There is no defence against the soft and the persuasive voice of a woman. But to use this weapon you must have plenty of ammunitions and I suggest that the basic task of any organisation such as yours is to make sure that every woman in every home has a knowledge of the basic principles of progress, a clear definition of direction of development and a true understanding of the part she can play. I feel that the greatest contribution that our women can make towards the progress and development of this country is by the soft but persistent voice in every home, persuading and inspiring their husbands and their sons to greater efforts, to work harder and to greater dedication to improve their standard of living and their way of life.

While persuading and inspiring their husbands and their sons to playing their full part in the development and progress of our country the women themselves can also play their part. By their efforts and by their endeavour they can improve their homes, by having more balanced diets in the family. Also women can help to supplement family income by establishing small cottage industries in the home so that they and their daughters can do useful work in their spare time. Above all our women, by their effort and example can generate a spirit of change and a progress in the home.

Ladies, these are the basic things which I feel our women can do and can play their part in the development and progress of our nation. I feel that Seminars such as yours could be of great benefit to our country and our people if it can be used to direct women's thoughts to all these matters, to train and educate them in the basic principles of progress, to train and educate them on the part that they can play in our national development.