

SPEECH BY Y.B. TAN SRI FATIMAH BTE. HAJI HASHIM
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIFTH GENERAL
MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S
ORGANISATIONS AT DEWAN AL-MALIK FAIZAL, FACULTY
OF ISLAM, UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN, PETALING JAYA
ON SATURDAY, 26TH AUGUST, 1972 AT 9.30 A.M.

It gives me great pleasure to be once again with you all this morning to speak at the General Meeting of the National Council of Women's Organisations Malaysia.

As this meeting is held once in two years and since this is the fifth General Meeting, it means that our organisation is now entering into its second decade. Even though our organisation is relatively new its growth and activities during the last ten years have shown that it is now a very strong and mature organisation. As a result of your unflinching support and sacrifice all this while we have now evolved a very united and influential organisation, so much so whatever we have put forward for the consideration of the various authorities have thus far been accorded a very good reception by them.

As for me, I am very proud to be associated with so many organisations and associations affiliated to the National Council of Women's Organisations which are in turn led by so many progressive leaders of very high calibre and quality. As the President of the N.C.W.O., I am deeply honoured and indebted to you all for the unflinching support and co-operation that you have all given me so far.

I earnestly hope that you will all continue your struggle with the same zeal and enthusiasm because it is only through our united effort can we as a body continue to better the social status of the women in Malaysia and also our society and the nation as a whole.

Before I briefly trace back all our important achievements during the last ten years, I like first of all to welcome into the fold three new organisations which have been recently affiliated to us. These organisations are the Girl Guides Association of Malaysia, the Catholic Women's League and the Women's Section of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress. With their coming in, it means that the N.C.W.O. now has altogether thirteen members. With these new additions, the N.C.W.O. as a whole has become even more stronger.

While thus consolidating and strengthening our position in West Malaysia, we must not also forget our counterparts in East Malaysia. We have to try and invite the various Women's organisations and associations in East Malaysia to join us and thus reap the advantages of our struggles and share our aspirations. Such getting together of the women of East and West Malaysia will further foster the goodwill and co-operation between our people in these two regions. When this is achieved, it will mean that almost all the women's organisations and associations would be brought under one roof and this will definitely strengthen our position and enable us to struggle more effectively to safeguard and promote the conditions and status of women and children and also our society in general. In fact this was the main aim of the N.C.W.O. at its inception.

As an exercise to exchange ideas and also opinions to our mutual benefit, we should be proud of the seminar we had last year on "RUKUNEGARA" aimed in helping members to

understand, accept, support and practise the principles embodied therein. Recently we have also given our cooperation to the Women's Section of the Universiti Kebangsaan Students Union in holding a seminar on the problems of leadership of women in Malaysia. This seminar was very successful and various resolutions were adopted and handed over to me at the end of the seminar.

I followed the seminar with very keen interest and have also studied the resolutions adopted by it. After studying the resolutions I discovered that amongst the young generation of women, there are a few who are not quite aware of many of the things that we have struggled and achieved on behalf of the women in Malaysia thus far. I suppose this is because they have so far been busy with their studies and are only now beginning to join us in our effort to achieve a better status for women in our country. I therefore like to suggest that we produce a booklet of our struggles and achievements and aspirations which can be of help and guide not only to us but also to our future generation.

Regarding the laws connected with the various interests of women and children, our opinions and the results of our research have from time to time been forwarded to the authorities concerned for action. I am very happy to say that within the last two years in particular, we have achieved quite a great deal in this field. As a result of our agitation, the National Islamic Religious Council has for the first time appointed a lady, Puan Saleha bte. Mohd. Ali as one of its committee members. Her appointment has been approved by His Majesty The Yang di-Pertuan Agong. In this respect, I would like to thank Y.A.B. Tun Abdul Razak our Prime Minister for his cooperation and support.

As regards the Royal Commission appointed to study the Marriage and Divorce Bill for non-Muslims, the N.C.W.O. set up a committee to draft a memorandum for the consideration of the Royal Commission. This Committee finished its work on the 11th of November last year. I am happy to inform you that most of our proposals and recommendations have been considered and accepted by the Royal Commission. I earnestly hope that the Bill will be tabled at Parliament as soon as possible in the interest of safeguarding the matrimonial status of women.

As to our request that women should be allowed to act as members of the Jury, I am also happy to inform you that Government is already taking action to meet this.

In passing, I would also like to mention the setting up by the Government of the Legal Aid Bureau in Kuala Lumpur. The Bureau has recently opened up a branch in Alor Star to cater for the people in the northern areas and I understand it will soon be setting up a branch in Kuala Trengganu too to cater for the east coast areas. As you all might know, the main aim of this Bureau is to give free legal service for members of our society who are poor. One field where it provides its services is regarding cases coming under "Married Women and Children (Enforcement of Maintenance) Act 1968 and also cases for maintenance in courts which administers Hukum Syarak. I hope you will all understand the nature of the service that this Bureau is providing and encourage our members and supporters to use its services as fully as possible.

As you all might know, the Government has also recently agreed to set up an Anti-Narcotic Bureau to safeguard our youth from the abuses of drug taking. This is indeed a very welcome and timely move to safeguard the moral of our youth and other dangerous influence on our future generations. I appeal to you all to give your full cooperation in helping the Government towards this end.

Another very important field in which we as women can play a significant role is in the field of education. This Council has already taken action to urge the Government to take in a woman as a member of the Higher Education Council, as at the moment there is no woman member in it. At the grass root level our women can play a very important role indeed by bringing closer the relationship between parents and teachers. I hope our members will give all the support possible to the Education Department in setting up the Parent/Teacher Associations which will greatly benefit us and also enable us to follow the progress of our children in the field of education.

As you know, Women's Day celebration has been a regular feature of our annual activity. Only yesterday we celebrated the 11th anniversary of Women's Day. In keeping with the theme of Women's Day this year, i.e. "Gerakan Pembaharuan", I urge you all to rededicate yourselves to the national goals and adapt your attitudes, thoughts and also mode of operation not only to better ourselves but also the prosperity and happiness of our society as a whole. Through this meeting I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to all our affiliated organisations and associations throughout West Malaysia for their cooperation to the N.C.W.O. particularly in holding the Women's Day celebrations.

From what I have stated so far it is obvious that our activities are not confined only to holding Women's Day celebrations every year as alleged by some of our own members. I like to emphasise here that the N.C.W.O. is not a political, religious or racial organisation but a consultative and advisory body consisting of all the women's organisations and associations in Malaysia.

Under the umbrella of the N.C.W.O. we have managed to unite the energies and aspirations of the women in Malaysia and thereby make us into a very united and strong body thus enabling us to carry out our struggles and aspirations more effectively on behalf of all our women and children in particular and our society and nation in general.

We have to look far ahead and acquire a lot of foresight in planning our activities and we should also constantly aspire to be more united and strong. With this added vigour, vitality and unity and a change of spirit consonant with the theme of "Gerakan Pembaharuan", I am sure we all have a very bright future.

That's all and I have now great pleasure in declaring open the Fifth General Meeting of the National Council of Women's Organisations and I hope this meeting will be a great success.