



**Press Release – For Immediate Publication
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Increase women's representation: adopt TWOAS across Malaysia with accountability

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) welcomes the Penang state government's 'Top-Up Women-Only Additional Seats' initiative as a bold, innovative and much needed measure to increase women's representation in the state legislative assembly to a minimum critical mass of 30%.

Malaysia is far behind in its obligations to uphold equality for women in political life. Over 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Malaysia's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995, and despite open commitments to minimum 30% women's representation by certain political parties, only 14.4% of our Members of Parliament are women. None of our 13 states have achieved minimum 30% women's representation in their respective legislative assemblies, with the closest being Perlis at 26.7%, followed by Selangor (21.4%), Johor (16.1%) and Penang at 15.0%.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of UN Women, has said that it will take another 50 years to achieve gender equality in the political sphere at the current rate of change. Detractors of TWOAS, such as Penang Gerakan Wanita who insist that the issue could be resolved if political parties were to nominate more women candidates for election, fail to appreciate how severely unequal the playing field is for women. In reality, women face multiple obstacles to participating in political life, including structural barriers such as exclusion at the party level, lack of social and family support, cultural backlash in the form of sexism and misogyny, and capacity gaps where they are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to make it into the game. The current system is clearly not working. Something needs to be done, and we cannot wait another 50 years before it happens.

Temporary special measures such as TWOAS are a critical strategy towards levelling the playing field for women in politics. They are in fact part of Malaysia's state obligations as a party to CEDAW. In February 2018, the CEDAW Committee recommended that the Malaysian government expand the use of temporary special measures such as allocation of resources, numerical goals with time frames, and quota systems, to accelerate gender equality in areas where women continue to be underrepresented or disadvantaged. Such measures are not designed to go on indefinitely, but up until a certain point where gender balance is better achieved.

JAG calls upon the federal government and other state governments in Malaysia to adopt TWOAS and/or other similar temporary special measures in order to accelerate the increase of women's political representation in Parliament and all state legislative assemblies.

While we understand that under TWOAS, appointments will be made in accordance with the percentage of votes received by parties in state elections, we take seriously concerns that this could be open to abuse of power which undermines democracy. Hence, JAG also calls for a transparent and public monitoring mechanism to be put into place to check and balance the appointment and performance of additional women representatives under TWOAS. Such a mechanism should include termination options in the event of misconduct or non-performance. Just as voters can vote out elected representatives, appointed leaders must similarly be held fully and unequivocally accountable to the electorate.

Last but not least, it goes without saying that appointed women leaders under TWOAS must be able to advance women's rights in real and practical ways. JAG calls for women's and civil society groups working directly on issues on the ground, to be consulted in the TWOAS appointment and monitoring process. We look forward to working together with both federal and state governments to advance women's equality in politics.

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Endorsed by the following JAG member organisations:

1. EMPOWER Malaysia
2. Women's Centre for Change (WCC)
3. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
4. Association of Women Lawyers (AWL)
5. Family Frontiers
6. Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO)
7. Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS)
8. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
9. Perak Women for Women Society (PWW)
10. Justice for Sisters (JFS)
11. Knowledge and Rights with Young People through Safer Space (KRYSS Network)
12. Sisters in Islam (SIS)
13. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)

About the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG)

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) is a coalition of 14 women's rights organisations in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. Since 1985, we have been advocating for gender equality and social justice in Malaysia within a feminist framework. We leverage our diverse expertise and amplify women's voices to raise public awareness and advocate for law reform. We uphold international human rights standards in promoting justice, equality, and non-discrimination.

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