



PRESS RELEASE

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Malaysian Government Should Defend Women's Rights to Public and Political Participation

KRYSS Network condemns the online gender-based violence and harassment directed at participants/speakers of "Parlimen Digital" and call for the Malaysian government to take the necessary measures to defend the rights to public and political participation equally for all, and especially for women and girls.

KRYSS Network was impressed with the participation of young people in "Parlimen Digital", an event organised by Undi18, Challenger Malaysia and Liga Rakyat Demokratik, on 4th and 5th July. The event showed that there were many issues that young people felt that were not being adequately addressed by the Malaysian government. They had every right to raise these issues, a right to expression protected under Article 10 of the Federal Constitution. However, some members of the audience mocked and ridiculed these participants/speakers questioning their "legitimacy". Yet, the event organisers had already explained that the event was to show that it was technically feasible for Parliamentary proceedings to be held online, even during the Movement Control Order, and that orderly and productive debates on issues important to the *rakyat* could still be held.

KRYSS Network observed that the online gender-based violence and harassment was largely directed at the female "Yang Berkhidmat" speakers, including the speakers representing Selayang and Labis, and these attacks remained persistent long after the event. The speakers faced various forms of online gender-based violence, including mob attacks, sexual harassment, threats of physical violence and racist comments.

Online gender-based violence is not a new phenomenon but a very real extension of gender-based violence and the negative effects can be as severe. It is rooted in the larger issues of gender inequalities, sexism and misogyny that hinder the progress of our nation. Digital technologies have rendered the manifestation of gender-based violence quicker, wider and more intense in its amplification and volume. Female politicians and journalists, women's rights activists, feminists, female lawyers, and even female artistes, have all been targets of online gender-based violence. The fact is women and girls, in all their diversity, face a disproportionate backlash for their public and political participation, online or offline. Just on Monday, in Parliament, a racist, colourist and sexist remark was made by Baling MP, YB Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim against Batu Kawan MP, YB Kasthuri Patto.

Having researched, monitored and documented online gender-based violence, KRYSS Network has found that the perpetrators, much like those who make sexist and misogynist

remarks in physical settings, have always paid little to zero attention to the issues the women raised, and are deliberately designed to undermine the validity of their public and political participation.

CEDAW noted in its General Recommendation No. 35 that technology is a factor in gender-based violence affecting women. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has recognised that the interaction between technology and women's human rights standards is marked by the recognition of the principle that human rights protected offline should also be protected online.

We urge the government to take the threats to women's public and political participation seriously. We especially urge the government to set up an inter-ministerial task force to which female victims could directly report incidents of online gender-based violence and harassment. Public education programmes on gender equality and the right to public and political participation by the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia would help reshape negative attitudes towards women's public and political participation. We also urge the Ministry of Education to introduce human rights education and gender studies to improve the understanding and appreciation for women's public and political participation, and gender equality in general.

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