



**OFFICIATING ADDRESS**

**YBRS. DR. WAN NUR IBTISAM BINTI WAN ISMAIL  
DIRECTOR GENERAL,  
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN DEVELOPMENT MALAYSIA**

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SYMPOSIUM – IGNITE YOUR VIBES  
13<sup>th</sup> MAY 2023 (SATURDAY)**

*updated: 12<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, A Very Good Morning and Salam Malaysia Madani.

**(SALUTATIONS)**

- 1. Dr. Krishna Kumar**  
Rotary International District Governor
- 2. Ms. Thilagavathy Pillai**  
Organising Chairman
- 3. Ms. Susan Joseph**  
Host Club, Rotary Club of Damansara

#### **4. Ms. Kirenjit Kaur**

Chair, Rotary District 3300 Action Group on Women Empowerment & Past District Governor

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

#### **(A) INTRODUCTION**

1. It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning in gracing the **Women Empowerment Symposium – Ignite Your Vibes**. It is indeed an honour, and I am thrilled to meet all of you, as we celebrate the incredible women who have made a difference in our communities. Let me take this opportunity to thank the Rotary International District 3300 Malaysia, for inviting me and I am also

delighted to share some of my thoughts and experiences on Malaysia's development in empowering women.

2. As an esteemed global service organisation with a strong track record of humanitarian efforts, Rotary International District 3300 (Three Three Zero Zero) has been making a significant impact in empowering women. Particularly noteworthy is the work of the District Action Group on Women Empowerment, which has been instrumental in organising this event and introducing the **Ivy Award to honour the unsung heroines who have significantly contributed to serving others.**
3. Empowering women **begins with being free from any form of discrimination and securing gender equality.** It is about encouraging

women to be financially, culturally, and socially independent. A woman must be entitled to pursue what she loves and develop into a fully functioning human. Her individuality must be nurtured and acknowledged. As a woman, I understand the challenges that many of us face in our daily lives, especially in empowering women from all walks of life to become leaders in their own right, be it their personal aspirations or professional dreams.

4. **The Malaysian Gender Gap Index (MGGI)** which identifies the gap between women and men in four (4) sub-indices covering **Economic Opportunity and Participation, Educational Achievement, Health and Life**, as well as **Political Dominance** shows an average score of **0.707 in 2021**, which is 0.7 percentage points lower compared to **0.714 in 2020**.

5. However, **women's achievements exceed men's in the Educational Achievement sub-index as well as the Health and Life sub-index.** The achievement of women is far greater compared to men in the field of Education Achievement where women dominate in the gross enrolment rate at all levels of education in Malaysia. **At the tertiary level, women recorded 47.5 percent and higher than men which is at 33.8 percent.**
  
6. Women also exceed men in life expectancy. In 2021, a newborn **baby girl is expected to live until the age of 77, while a baby boy is up to 72.3 years old.**

## **(B) WOMEN - AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN MALAYSIA MADANI**

**Ladies & Gentlemen,**

7. Women empowerment is a shared responsibility in raising the dignity of women in Malaysia. The success of Malaysia Madani begins with the role played by women in every household. The aspect of **KeMampanan** (sustainability), **kesejAhteraan** (prosperity), **Daya cipta** (innovation), **penghormAtan** (respect), **keyakiNan** (trust) and **Ihsan** (compassion) in **MADANI** revolves around the role of women in shaping the mind of present and future generations. Their role in society is very important as they are great

contributors to national progress, institutional development, kinship and strengthening family bonds.

8. Respect and recognition for women is something that is prioritised by the Government in Malaysia Madani concept. As such, giving women their space and equal opportunity as to men, respecting their views and entrusting their leadership are some forms of honouring women. This would in return strengthen society and the nation at large.
9. The 2020 World Economic Forum report has stated that women in Malaysia are very creative, have excellent communication skills and are impressively good in problem-solving which is in line with future job requirements. These capabilities are in line with the needs of 4.0 Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) which



ensures that women can continue to contribute to the development of the country, especially in the economic field. Women are not only entrusted to self-boost confidence but are also expected to play an important role in building a society that is confident, capable and charismatic in materialising Malaysia Madani aspirations.

### **(C) WOMEN & LEADERSHIP**

10. For more than two decades, there have been calls for greater gender equality while enhancing the need to close the gender gap in Malaysia. Although tremendous strides have been made in this aspect, there is still a fundamental lack of women in leadership roles.

11. According to the **Malaysian Gender Gap Index (MGGI)**, the gender gap is quite significant between men and women in political participation. **The Political Dominance sub-index recorded no change in score of 0.10 in 2021 and 2020** as compared to a full score of 1.0. Women's involvement in politics is still low if we look at the representation in the Dewan Rakyat (Parliament).
  
12. As of January 2023, there are only **30 female Members of Parliaments (MPs), out of 222 seats**, representing only around **13.5 percent of the entire House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat)** meanwhile in the **Senate (Dewan Negara)**, there are only **10 women representatives out of 51 Senators (18 percent)**.

13. Statistics of women ministers in the **Cabinet remain below 20 percent**. After the 15<sup>th</sup> General Election 2022, only **5 women are appointed as ministers (17.9 percent)**.
  
14. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2022, women holding decision-making positions of Premier Grade C and above in public agencies stand at 38.8 percent and the statistics of women as corporate decision-makers for the Top 100 PLCs as of December 2022 stands at 29 percent. Starting from 1st September 2022, based on the Budget 2022, the Securities Commission Malaysia made it **mandatory for all public-listed companies to appoint at least one female director**.

15. While much progress has been made for women in leadership, **much more has to be done to empower and enable more women to reach positions of prominence and leadership** in many aspects of society which are still dominated by men.

#### **(D) WOMEN & ECONOMY**

**Ladies & Gentlemen,**

16. It is irrefutable that despite living in the 21st century, **there are still women who are not able to pursue their careers and live up to their full potential.** There are some of us who are still held back by the same traditional barriers that bound progress and career mobility.

17. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, in the year 2021, **women comprise 39.0 percent of the country's labour force.** Meanwhile, the **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFRP) for women is at 55.5 percent compared to 80.9 percent for men.**
  
18. It is quite unsatisfactory especially when we look at the achievement of women that exceed men in the field of education where women dominate in the gross enrolment rate at all levels of education in Malaysia. **This rate is also much lower when compared to other ASEAN countries such as Singapore at 69.7 percent and Thailand at 66.8 percent.**
  
19. For example, the Employment Act (Amendment) 2022 introduced several significant changes to the previous act that aimed at benefiting both employees

and employers in Malaysia that includes increasing women's participation in the workforce. The amended Act **increased the length of paid maternity leave from 60 to 98 days.** The Act also introduces a new section that **prohibits an employer from terminating an employee who is pregnant or is suffering from an illness arising out of her pregnancy.** The amendments also require an employer to always exhibit visibly a **notice to raise awareness of sexual harassment at the place of employment.**

20. The government also will continue to simplify the guidelines for childcare centres in offices, including allowing the provision of childcare centres at higher office levels and calling for employers to play a role in being responsible for the provision of childcare centres in the office.

21. As for the Department of Women Development, we will continue to conduct Income Generation Programmes that aim to increase the participation of women, especially single mothers, in economic activities that involve elements of entrepreneurship, financial literacy and the digital economy.

## **(E) WOMEN & SAFETY**

**Ladies & Gentlemen,**

22. Violence and discrimination can affect women's lives and hold them back from playing a full part in the workplace, society and the economy. *Women* have the right to be free from violence, harassment and discrimination. Removing the barriers of an unsafe environment can help *women* fulfil their dreams.

23. Therefore, the government under the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development has tabled the **Anti-Sexual Harassment Act 2022 (AAGS 2022)** that has been passed in the Parliament last year. The act was gazetted on 18 October 2022 which aims to provide a safe environment, especially for women in the workplace. The Act applies to all individuals regardless of gender and aims to eradicate the culture of normalizing sexual harassment in Malaysian society not only through the enforcement of the Act but assisted by a comprehensive advocacy programme.
24. **The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Advocacy Program** have been formulated with the aim of clarifying the implementation of the advocacy programme related to preventive measures



and promoting awareness of sexual harassment at all levels of society. These guidelines include an action plan for the prevention and awareness of sexual harassment.

25. The Ministry has also crafted **anti-sexual harassment notices to be displayed in each public and private organization or premises** respectively in accordance with the amendment of provisions under the Employment Act 1955. **AAGS 2022 will also be enforced in stages starting from 28 March 2023 which involves the enforcement of the act on the definition of sexual harassment, elements of awareness and prevention of sexual harassment in the community.**

## **(F) WOMEN & PROSPERITY**

26. Department of Women Development is also involved in programmes that focused on women's well-being and health. Programmes such as Legal Literacy and Women's Rights Programme, Women's Resilience & Psychology Programme and the Squad WAJA Programme which is a women's empowerment program in the community are the highlights of our commitments to women empowerment in the year 2023.

## **(G) CLOSING**

**Ladies & Gentlemen,**

27. **Gender equality is something we must continue to strive for.** After all, women's participation in all aspects of the economy, and indeed the society at large, is something that will be beneficial to all. According to the World Bank 2019 Malaysia Country Report: Breaking Barriers, "If all economic barriers are removed for women in Malaysia, the country's income per capita could grow by 26.2 percent – implying an average annual income gain of RM9,400". In other words, women's participation in the economy can be a game-changer.
28. As women, we often underestimate the power we hold and the impact we can make. But when we come together, we create an unstoppable force. The theme of this symposium, **Ignite Your Vibes, is very apt to the current**

**situation and encourages us to tap into the energy within ourselves and unleash our full potential.**

29. I once again would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to deliver the officiating keynote address and wish success to the discussions that will take place throughout the day. I would also like to take this opportunity to **congratulate the recipient of Ivy Award** for your wonderful contribution toward women's empowerment and to society.
30. Remember, that the process of empowerment does not happen overnight but it is not impossible. **Let us acknowledge and celebrate our little victories and ignite our vibes and create a brighter future for all.**