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Defer enforcement of law, women's groups tell states

**KUALA LUMPUR:** At least 200 women-based groups have called on state governments, which have gazetted the Islamic Family Law, to suspend its enforcement until concerns related to the amendments to the federal one was resolved.

This is one of the 10 proposals outlined by the organisations to be included in a memorandum to create a clearly defined law based on the principles of justice and equality.

National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) president Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan said the memorandum would be submitted to the Attorney-General's Chambers, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim) and Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil soon.

"We would like to ask the Federal Government to call for a moratorium by state governments that have adopted and enforced it until matters are resolved," she said at the end of a briefing and consultation organised by NCWO on the controversial Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Amendment Act 2005 which was passed by Parliament.

She said the organisations also appealed to the Federal Government to set up a parliamentary select committee to study the matter.

"We are worried about the consultation process carried out by Jakim. It has to include stakeholders and can't go on without including women who are greatly disadvantaged by the amendments to the law," she added.

Other proposals include ensuring that:

- The law is benchmarked against the best and good practices of Islamic Family Law models in the world;
- The benchmarking of the law must be based on the principles of justice, equality, compassion and dignity;
- The law reflects the reality of today's world taking into consideration the roles of men and women; and
- Provisions of the law must abide by the principles of law and Federal Constitution and not allow any gender discrimination.

Sisters in Islam executive director Zainah Anwar said Malaysia could use laws in other countries such as Morocco's Islamic Family Law 2004, which was based on the framework of justice as a model to formulate a new law.

Language expert Prof Nik Safiah Nik Karim said lawmakers should study the words used in the provisions, particularly Section 23(9) and Section 107(A) pertaining to issues of claims, division and disposal of property so as to protect the interest of Muslim families and children.