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No good rationale for Bill

IN RESPONSE to the recent amendments to the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories), the All Women's Action Society (Awam) wishes to voice its grave concerns on the substance of the amendments as well as the manner in which the Bill was passed.

We are alarmed by several provisions in the Bill, including the amendment extending *fasakh* to men, who already have the right to *talaq*, while a woman's right to seek divorce remains unchanged; and the loosening of conditions for polygamy, wherein a man now only has to prove that the polygamous marriage is necessary.

This will worsen rather than resolve the problem of irresponsible husbands taking on another wife despite being unable or unwilling to provide for their other wives and children.

Awam questions the need for the Bill to be rushed through Parliament, to the extent that Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz invoked the Whip to ensure that Barisan Nasional senators vote for the Bill.

We have yet to hear of a good rationale as to why this was done. Uniformity of Islamic law across all states is an unsound justification to force the passing of a Bill upon which many grave reservations have been aired.

Awam believes the public must be involved in the process of creating such laws. We all have a stake in this.

The repercussions of this Bill touch every strata of society.

It is essential for the Government to be more responsive to the needs of the people, who should have been consulted from the beginning.

We therefore support the call by Sisters in Islam, as part of the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, not to gazette and enforce the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) 2005 pending further amendments.

Awam urges the Government to immediately deal with concerns on this issue, in line with the Prime Minister's stance at the Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting in May that the laws of this country must not discriminate against women.

Judith Loh-Koh

President,

All Women's Action Society,

Petaling Jaya.

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