



Press Release

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Malaysian Government's Commitment to Gender Equal Citizenship: A Call For Action:

It's been a year since the Malaysian Government made a commitment to enable Malaysian women to confer citizenship to their children born overseas by operation by law, on an equal basis with men.

The Government's [announcement](#) to amend Part I Section 1(1)(d) and 1(1)(e) Part II, Section 1(c) and 1(c) of the Second Schedule of the Federal Constitution marked a milestone in this long-awaited move towards gender equality and equal citizenship rights. But how much has this issue progressed in the last twelve months?

Unfortunately this progressive amendment has been bundled with five other regressive amendments which will remove existing rights in the Federal Constitution that protect vulnerable children against the threat of statelessness.

Despite calls from Family Frontiers and other CSOs to decouple the amendment granting Malaysian women the equal right to confer citizenship to their children from the five regressive amendments, the Government seems intent on tabling both the progressive and regressive amendments together.

The Malaysian Mothers' Network is heartbroken that their hard work and efforts to ensure their children are able to obtain citizenship are being used as an opportunity to deprive other vulnerable groups of children from their right to citizenship. This was not what was promised by the government – be it Pakatan Harapan or Barisan Nasional – when they committed to advocate for Malaysian mothers in their GE15 election manifestos.

We remain firm in our demand that the government must decouple the amendments: proceed with the amendment to grant Malaysian mothers the equal right to confer citizenship to their children; drop the 5 regressive amendments that will remove existing citizenship rights to vulnerable groups of children.

We are thankful that the Home Affairs Minister has been efficient in approving the citizenship applications of some of the mothers and their children under Article 15(2). This is a clear signal that the Government is committed to addressing the backlog of citizenship applications. These approvals have brought tremendous relief to these families; some of whom are in precarious situations due to challenges brought on by lack of citizenship for their children. Nevertheless, many more mothers continue to await results on their pending applications.

Challenges in legislative reform towards equal citizenship.

In addition, several challenges continue to plague the legislative reform process:

Delayed timeline: The timeline for tabling of the amendment has been moved several times in the past year, from [June](#) 2023 to [November](#) 2023 to the present. Expediency is crucial to ensure that Malaysian mothers and their children do not suffer prolonged injustices — justice delayed is justice denied.

Transparency: Additionally, the government has not been transparent in presenting a draft of the proposed amendment bill to Family Frontiers and other civil society organisations (CSOs). The lack of transparency has led Family Frontiers to rely on various announcements made by the Home Minister to infer what the amendment contains. For example, on the issue of retroactive application. The government must provide clarity on whether the amendment will retroactively apply to children born prior to the amendments passage. Any amendment must be retroactive, as overseas born children of Malaysian mothers remain affected by their inability to obtain Malaysian citizenship. Moreover, how will the amendment affect adult children who themselves have children?

International obligations

The amendment must address the rights of Malaysian women with regard to their overseas-born adult children comprehensively. It is crucial to rectify any gender disparities and ensure that Malaysian women enjoy the same rights and privileges as Malaysian men, particularly given the historical context of this issue spanning over 60 years.

This International Women's Day, we strongly urge the government to table the citizenship amendments without further delay and decouple the amendment guaranteeing Malaysian mothers equal citizenship rights from the five regressive amendments that have met strong opposition from stakeholders. It is crucial that the government does so to achieve meaningful progress, in line with the promise of Malaysia MADANI.

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Submitted by - Association of Family Support & Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)