

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Launch of the Report:
The Effectiveness of Existing Laws to Prevent and Curb Sexual
Harassment**

Bandar Sunway, 27 November 2019 – The Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI) today launched a report entitled, “The Effectiveness of Existing Laws to Prevent and Curb Sexual Harassment” at the Sunway University. The report launch ceremony gathered relevant key stakeholders including public officials, civil society groups, researchers and members of the media.

Escalating numbers of sexual harassment cases in schools, workplaces, private and public places pose great challenges, thus raising the questions on the adequacy and effectiveness of existing measures including laws to prevent and curb sexual harassment. From January and June this year, there were 711 reported cases related to sexual harassment under sections 354, 377D, 377E and 509 of the Penal Code [Act 574]. Sexual harassment in the workplace often goes unreported, as most people are still afraid to lodge report or file civil claims.

Some significant works have already been carried out on sexual harassment by researchers from universities, civil society organisations (CSOs), media and public agencies amongst others. However, this report will cover amongst others, a comprehensive discussion including analysis on Malaysia’s international obligations and domestic legislations, findings on public’s understanding of sexual harassment including the individual’s readiness to lodge a report to the relevant authorities and their knowledge of the existing laws and constructive proposals for future key policy recommendations.

In her welcome address, Sarena Cheah Yean Tih, S.M.S, Managing Director, Sunway Integrated Properties Sdn Bhd on behalf of ASLI Chairman, Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah accorded her appreciation to all 1052 respondents whom graciously shared their knowledge and experiences in making this research project possible. She also thanked Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) and All Women’s Action Society (AWAM) for their strong support and their work as the peer reviewers for this research project. During the address, she informed that to strengthen the call to end violence against women, ASLI is developing a SOS mobile application that will be launched soon. This application, aptly named as MySisters, will enable Malaysian women to seek for emergency assistance. This app will be powered by ASLI, with collaborations from WAO and AWAM.

In her special address, YB Puan Nurul Izzah Anwar, Member of Parliament for Permatang Pauh, commended the effort taken by ASLI-CPPS as well as the significant support provided by WAO and AWAM in the completion of the timely report. YB Nurul Izzah Anwar believed that this comprehensive study is pertinent to further enhance the protection of sexual harassment victims and ensure justice is served for the accused resting on a more solid legal ground.

She further highlighted her ongoing efforts through active engagements with several women’s rights groups and her submission of recommendations to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development based on her rigorous discussion with relevant key stakeholders.



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The report launch ceremony was then followed by the launch of the report and the presentation of research findings and key recommendations by Mr Danesh Chandran, Head of ASLI Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS). ASLI's research found that the respondents' knowledge on the existing laws for handling sexual harassment cases is low. Majority of the participants in "World Café" Focus Group Discussions are aware that there are existing laws in handling sexual harassment cases but most of them are not aware of the exact Act's name and the jurisdiction of each of them, particularly the Employment Act and Labour Ordinances. While their awareness on existing laws and other mechanism in workplace is average, a high number of participants opined that existing laws are not sufficient to prevent and curb sexual harassment.

The expert panel saw a discussion on the topic by representatives of leading women's rights organisations in the country such as Ms Sumitra Visvanathan, Executive Director, Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), Ms Betty Yeoh, Co-Founder, All Women's Action Society (AWAM) and Ms Melissa Sasidaran, Director, Lawyers for Liberty (LFL).

Ms Melissa Ong, ASLI CEO states, *"We are extremely pleased with the launch of this timely report. This report could not arrive at a better time as we believe existing laws contain major gaps to comprehensively address sexual harassment cases and protect our Malaysian women. We are fully committed to take these key policy recommendations forward in future Round Table Discussions and deliberations with some of you. We hope that the Government will consider to include offences of stalking, cyberbullying and doxxing to be part of the proposed Sexual Harassment Act"*.

She further added, *"We would like to stress that we uphold zero-tolerance policy on any form of violence, especially against women and we fully support any policy or act that enhance the protection of sexual harassment victims in this country"*.

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About Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI)

The Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute or in short "ASLI" is Malaysia's leading independent, non-partisan and not-for-profit think-tank. Since its establishment in 1993, ASLI has established a renowned reputation as the definitive link between the public sector, the private sector, academia and civil society in pursuit of its mission of creating a better society. ASLI is owned and governed by the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation (JCF). We curate thought-provoking and intellectual dialogues in an effort to bring change in public policies for the betterment of society. We provide strategic analysis and advise on critical issues impacting the nation and beyond. In the wider Asia Pacific region, we capitalise on our influential network to harness best practices and connect strategic partners across APAC on highest-value business investment and trade opportunities to foster bilateral relations and economic growth. Further information of ASLI is available at www.asli.com.my

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