

## Feedback on:

### HEARD IN A CONFERENCE:

**"WOMEN IN THE SOUTH HAVE MADE GAINS IN THEIR FIGHT FOR RIGHTS, EQUALITY. BUT WHEN THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT—WHICH IS MORE THREATENING TO MEN—ATTACHED ITSELF TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT—IT (THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT) ERODED THESE GAINS." DO YOU AGREE?**

I thought the lesbian movement was part of the women's movement. Have never really understood the constant segregations within segregations. In India at least, I can't imagine a lesbian movement independent of a women's movement. Many gains in this country have been as a result of the women's movement. Unfortunately, "lesbian" has often been used as a stereotype term by those who feel threatened by the women's movement.

*Naina (advocate and convenor, Sakshi)*

## Feedback on:

**ACCORDING TO THE FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW, JULY 4, 1996, SINGAPOREAN AND MALAYSIAN EXECUTIVES STATE THAT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS NOT A PROBLEM IN THEIR COUNTRY. IS THIS TRUE?**

Warm greetings from Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW).

In response to the Far Eastern Economic Review survey (who did they ask, anyway?), my comments are:

There has never been a national survey or a good sample survey on sexual harassment done in Malaysia. The only exception was one small survey by the Malaysian Trade Union Council (MTUC)

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in 1988. But this survey had some flaws, namely: 1) It was carried out to study the incidence of sexual harassment in quasi-governmental workplace. Some 1,000 questionnaires were disseminated to women employees working at low-scale levels, i.e., clerks and typists. What was not taken into consideration was the hierarchical protocol in this kind of establishment where each questionnaire returned had to go through the head of the department or division! Only 40 percent responded. 2) The components of sexual harassment were not listed, so the respondents who weren't sure what sexual harassment was all about (and there were many of them) were of course in the dark as to what the questions were all about. So, the findings were inconclusive and not of much use.

However, media in Malaysia (print and TV) are very interested to cover this issue. The All Women Action Society (AWAM) is also doing some work on this. According to AWAM, from the various workshops and discussions on sexual harassment they have conducted with women government employees and university students, about 90 percent of the participants said that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment either at work or on the street. This range from cat calls or wolf whistles to a direct "if you want this. . . , you have to sleep with me". But when these participants were asked "What is sexual harassment?" an overwhelming majority were not very sure what actions really constitute sexual harassment. Most of

them gave vague answers such as "immoral conduct" rather than concrete examples of a specific action.

So, in general most people in Malaysia (both women and men) are not very clear on the definition of sexual harassment or on what actions qualify as sexual harassment. Secondly, there might well be variations on the types of harassment or unwanted attention women experience, depending on their position in the workplace—i.e., a woman executive or a senior manager or a clerk. Possibly being at the bottom rung of the ladder give some men the "power" to come on real strong, while further up the ladder, the prestige that comes with the position superficially protect women executives. So, instead of direct hard-core harassment, they received a more subtle kind of unwanted attention. Unfortunately, because people are not very clear what sexual harassment is, they shrug it off as "expected" conduct! But when we just probe a bit more, these women will readily relate their heartaches!

*Warm wishes,  
Kristina Ramlan  
Asian-Pacific Resource  
and Research Centre for  
Women (ARROW)*

## My dear Girlie and all the other sisters in Isis,

This is to wish you all Merry X-Mas and a very creative, happy, and satisfying New Year. May all of you and Isis become stronger (inside and outside) and keep getting connected to many more like-minded women, men and children and keep making connections for others.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

### Should prostitution be recognized as work or is it a violation of women's rights and integrity?

If you have questions you wish to raise, send them to us also and let's ask our readers:

"What do you think?"

It is really an honor and a pleasure for me to be connected with Isis and to do with it whatever little I am able to contribute. I would like to begin the New Year by renewing my commitment to and solidarity with Isis.

I have received *Women in Action* No. 2, 1996. It is excellent. Please accept my congratulations for the wonderful job all of you are doing.

I am delighted to see that you have brought out four monographs on Gender and Food Security and also a Food Security Infopack. Can you please send me five sets of these publications for sharing with the groups here?

We (JAGORI) are in the middle of organizing several lobbying activities with Asian Women's Human Rights Council (AWHRC) on trafficking on the occasion of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of SAARC, I will ask AWHRC Bangalore people to send you a detailed report for *Women in Action*.

*With warmest regards,  
In solidarity,  
Kamla Bhasin  
(coordinator, FAO-NGO  
South Asia Programme)*

### Dear Sisters of Women In Action,

I have just read No. 2, 1996 and am impressed with the quality of the information included. I have received this magazine for many years. I have them saved in my extensive library and make them available for the women who come to my land, Rootworks, for study and creative work. I am now active in my local (small) community which has received a government grant because we have 93 percent poverty level at our local elementary school. The stories of women's economic self-help inspire me. I have so much to learn about community development. In spring, I will go to four weekend sessions for community training in rural development in Oregon.

I am also a novice with the Internet. Our public library offers free access for one hour a week and I am slowly learning. Please accept my gratitude for the work you do.

*Sincerely,*

*Jean Mountaingrove  
2000 King Mountain Trail  
Wolf Creek, OR, USA*

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