

Give unruly wives a gentle beating, minister tells Malaysian men

From the [Times](#) (of London) and the [South China Morning Post](#)

A Malaysian female minister who offered “tips” to husbands, including the advice to beat their wives “gently” to discipline them for “unruly” behaviour has outraged women’s rights groups.



Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff, deputy minister for women and family, was accused of normalising domestic violence with a two-minute video posted on Instagram called “Mother’s Tips”. She advises husbands first speak to “undisciplined and stubborn wives” and, if they are not compliant, to sleep apart from them.

Siti Zailah said that under Islam it was permissible for a husband to hit his wife if she engaged in untoward behaviour even after being told not to do so, and after the husband signalled his displeasure by “sleeping separately from her. . . If she remains undisciplined, then he can engage in physical touch that is gentle, educating, full of love, that does not hurt but shows firmness . . . by striking her gently, to show his strictness and how much he wants her to change.”

The deputy minister also counsels wives on how to win over their husbands. “Speak to your husbands when they are calm, finished eating, have prayed and are relaxed,” she suggests. “When we want to speak, ask for permission first.”

While advocating men to be physical towards their “stubborn” wives, Siti Zailah’s remedy for wives facing errant husbands is to surrender to the divine, telling women to “pray to God”.

Commenters on social media said the hardline Islamist political party that Siti Zailah is part of, the Parti Islam se-Malaysia (Pas), had a long track record of platforming these views.

...a collective of 11 leading local women’s rights groups including Sisters in Islam and the Women’s Aid Organisation in a statement urged the 58-year-old deputy minister to resign immediately over remarks they said were “grossly in error and a demonstration of failed leadership”.

“The deputy minister must step down for normalising domestic violence, which is a crime in Malaysia as well as for perpetuating ideas and behaviours that are opposed to gender equality,” the groups said.

Online, some commenters noted that while Siti Zailah’s remarks were made on the basis of Islamic teachings, the reality was that she was normalising a notion that was highly subjective. Her words were a partial summary of Quranic verses that describe men as the “caretakers of women” with a duty to advise and discipline them.

The unmistakable Islamic preacher style of Siti Zailah’s videos was widely noticed by the public who questioned whether she sees herself as a preacher or a minister.

“[She should] read the government’s domestic abuse statistics and try to resonate with the lived realities, or resign,” said extremism and conflict studies analyst Aizat Shamsuddin, who also underscored that Siti Zailah’s primary role was that of deputy minister in the federal government.

She has caused controversy before with her campaign for alcohol to be banned on Malaysian Airlines, the national

carrier, and for its female flight attendants to wear uniforms that are sharia compliant.

Her first order of business following her appointment to her current portfolio in March 2020, was mooted a law to compel female Muslim flight attendants to dress in a sharia-compliant manner. While initially focusing on the dress code of flight attendants, she later remarked that the law be mandated on everyone in the private sector as well as sports athletes, citing it was what Islam decreed.

In 2014, following the tragic downing of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukrainian airspace, Siti Zailah suggested the incident was a result of divine wrath that arose due to the airline's un-Islamic dress code and practice of serving alcohol.