

Stand up and be counted, women told

KUALA LUMPUR: Women need to be more vocal and stand up for their rights if they want to be recognised.

A prominent certified accountant called on the modern-day women to rid themselves of their timidity as they battle for greater social, professional and career recognition.

Urging them to stand up to be counted, Norlela Baharudin said it was time women enjoyed gender equality at work, which was still a male-dominated domain.

"Women's participation is not reflective of their population. There is less than 50 per cent of them at the office, mainly because a large number are homemakers, work in cottage industries or perform odd jobs.

"Some do not want to break the glass ceiling and be bold enough to take the risk of attempting to succeed at high-placed jobs, thus, losing the opportunity to climb up the career ladder," she said.

Norlela said this at a roundtable session titled 'BCorp Presents: In Thin Air – Addressing The Challenges of Women within the Workplace' at the Berjaya Times Square Hotel here.

The session included investment banker Datin Seri Sunita Mei-Lin Rajakumar, lawyer Penelope Gan Paik Ling and sustainability and governance practitioner Dr Jayanti Desai.

The four – who are Berjaya Corporation board members - discussed, among others, issues related to the 'glass ceiling and sticky floors' – which are challenges women faced every day to make it to the top at work.

To move up the ranks, Norlela advised women to change their mindset, be better educated, possess substance and improve their knowledge.

"We have to change with the times, knowing well that the working environment is often not supportive and biased towards women, many of whom have to juggle between their jobs and raising a family – thus, sacrificing their careers.

"But do remember, that women contributed immensely towards the success of many companies and organisations that recorded improved performances," she said.

In 2020, the **Statistics Department** reported that women contributed to over 55 per cent of the nation's economy, which meant that they contributed RM776.9 billion to the development of the nation.

However, the department discovered that the Malaysian women's labour force participation rate for 2020 was at 55.3 per cent, significantly lower than Thailand (66.8 per cent) and Singapore (69.7 per cent).

"What is holding back our female workforce?

"Is it gender discrimination, lack of recognition, sexual harassment or simply a blatant lack of resources?" Norlela asked.

She said it was often impossible for working women to perform both 100 per cent in the office and at home for the family.

"It is like expecting a woman not to be a woman, as they strive to be inclusive while facing obstacles to be recognised and credited for their work," said Norlela.

She pointed out that Berjaya Corporation had a 57 per cent representation of women on its management and board of directors, exceeding the 30 per cent mandate.

"The presence of independent directors demonstrates that the organisation is willing to accept outside views," she Norlela, who is a '30% Club Malaysia' mentoring manager.

Norlela said over 900 public listed companies on Bursa Malaysia met the 17 per cent quota of women on their boards, far short of the minimal 30 per cent benchmark quota.

She said women's representation on the companies' boards were rising but negligibly from 2018 (24 per cent), 2019 (26 per cent), 2020 (25 per cent) and 2021 (26 per cent).

"There are many talented and experienced women out there who have not gained recognition to fulfil their representation on the board of companies.

"Their profiles can be easily found in the '30% Club Malaysia' listing, Institute of Corporate Directors Malaysia, Malaysian Alliance of Corporate Directors and many other platforms.

"We are not asking companies to merely pluck any women to be on their board but meritorious criteria," she said.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/03/783619/stand-and-be-counted-women-told>