



# INROADS

April – August 2011

For internal circulation only

Dear friends,

So much has happened since the last issue of Inroads. Firstly, we congratulate Mok Chuang Lian as WAO's new president and a warm welcome to the EXCO Committee members for 2011-2013.

In these few months, we had the opportunity to meet many passionate individuals who support our cause by doing what they do best.

We followed the incredible hundred-day journey of a man from Hong Kong to Australia through his video logs. His only companion? The sleek enduro F800GS BMW motorbike. His mission? To meet with 10 chosen charitable organisations in 10 countries and learn about their issues. Congrats to Morgan Parker for finally completing his epic adventure.

We took to the runway at the Berrybow Charity Fashion Launch Party. Young entrepreneur, Michelle Chong launched her online boutique, Berrybow and raised funds at the same time. Many thanks to Michelle for her hard work.

We walked side by side with men in heels for a mile at Taman Jaya in conjunction with the "Walk A Mile In Her Shoes" event. Well done to all the men for being positive role models.

On 9 July 2011, we walked again. This time, we walked side by side 50,000 Malaysians and this time, we walked for electoral reform, for democracy, for Malaysia.

People express their views and opinions through ways they think is most effective. Should there be a debate as to how we support what we strongly believe in? Can we voice out our thoughts without fearing that we will be judged on our actions?

To those who took a firm stand for their beliefs, WAO salutes you for your resilience and determination, for being passionate about change and for knowing your rights to have a voice.

## Women's Aid Organisation

Tell me and I will forget, show me and I might remember, involve me and I will understand." - Confucius



### *Liberated*

*by Udiah (witness to Yah)*

*Liberated, I'm free from you  
Liberated, bondage is through  
Liberated, I'll speak my view  
Liberated, life to pursue*

*Oh come and hear the news*

*I am now free to choose*

*There is no more abuse*

*Gone are the loathsome blues*



*Because I'm*

*Liberated, I'm free from you*

*Liberated, bondage is through*

*Liberated, I'll speak my view*

*Liberated, life to pursue*

*An end to oppression*

*Freedom of expression*

*There'll be no concession*

*Gone is the depression*



*Because I'm*

*Liberated, I'm free of you*

*Liberated, bondage is through*

*Liberated, I'll speak my view*

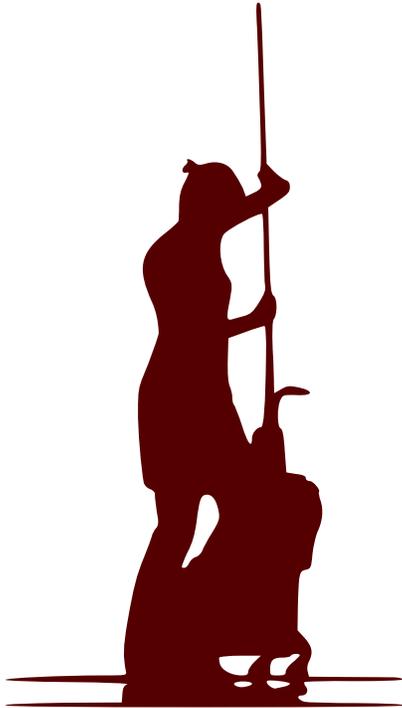
*Liberated, life to pursue*

Source: poemhunter.com



# DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS MUST BE PROTECTED

Letter to the Editor: The Star and New Straits Times, 13 June 2011



Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) wishes to extend its sincere condolences to the family of Indonesian domestic worker, Isti Komariyah, who died on 5 June in Malaysia after working here for two and a half years.

The news reports of the post mortem are extremely alarming. The results of the post mortem, which were announced by the police the day following her death, showed that Isti Komariyah had sustained recent bruises and had old scars all over her body, including on her face. It was also reported that her body was emaciated, and that she may have starved to death.

WAO is deeply concerned that this domestic worker may have been abused for some time without detection. Many questions are raised as to how this could have happened. If the domestic worker was given a mandated day off could she have sought help or alerted her employment agency? Was there inaction and negligence on the part of the agency which had facilitated the domestic worker's entry into Malaysia? Surely the agency has a duty of care to ensure the safety and security of the domestic workers for whom they find employment. The government has made a toll free line 'Talian Nur' available to domestic workers seeking assistance, however, has enough been done to reach out to migrant domestic workers with this number?

## Domestic workers must be treated with respect. They are not house slaves – they are workers who take a valuable place in many homes in the country.

The work of domestic workers is usually isolating. This isolation means that the women are trapped in homes and are vulnerable to abuse.

WAO hopes that the recent signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Malaysia and Indonesia leads to all employers adhering to the stipulated provision of one rest day per week and ensuring that a domestic worker's right to hold her own passport is upheld. Treating domestic workers as workers and affording them the rights of other workers, such as days off to meet friends and relax, is vital for their health and wellbeing. It is also vital so that in cases of abuse, the domestic worker can seek help.

*A quote from the First Lady of the United States (1933 - 1945) who was also an advocate for civil rights*

The battle for the **individual rights of women** is one of long standing and none of us should countenance anything which undermines it.

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

## Do You Know?

According to [www.domesticworkerrights.org](http://www.domesticworkerrights.org) domestic work fundamentally involves power relationships. It is never free of a gender perspective, often holds a race or ethnic perspective, sometimes involves age as a key aspect and almost always concerns poverty and class.

## DISPELLING THE MYTH OF THE CAUSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*Letter to the Editor: Sunday Star, 19 June 2011*

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) is appalled by the attitudes and misinformed beliefs of the recently launched Obedient Wives Club. By propagating their views as facts, the club is being downright irresponsible.

The club's spokespeople have been reported in the newspapers as claiming that domestic violence is caused by a wife's lack of obedience.

Domestic violence is not and will never be the fault of the women who are subjected to it.

It is a dangerous myth that women are perceived as responsible for the actions of their abusers. Men who are violent or abusive choose to be so and must be held responsible for their own actions.

Abused women exposed to the victim-blaming attitude of the Obedient Wives Club may become reluctant to come forward and report domestic violence. In light of recent cases of deaths after alleged prolonged domestic violence situations, it is of utmost importance that women feel that they will be supported, not blamed, when they report their abuse.

Since 1982, WAO has sheltered a total of 2,715 women and our social workers have counselled a further 1,966 women. Most of these women are survivors of domestic violence. These women are brave to have come forward to seek safety and support. Their courage must be commended, and they must never be blamed for the abuse they endured.



## WOMEN'S AID ORGANISATION SUPPORTS BERSIH 2.0

*Letter to the Editor: Malaysiakini, 23 June 2011*

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) fully supports BERSIH 2.0 and its demands for a vibrant and transparent democracy in Malaysia.

We support the BERSIH 2.0 gathering on 9 July 2011 and join the call for clean, free and fair elections.

A just and transparent system of government, and an accompanying just and transparent electoral process, is essential for Malaysia. Every voter deserves to know that their vote counts, and that the outcome of elections reflects the public will.

**The fulfilment of BERSIH 2.0's eight demands is essential to ensure public confidence in the electoral system.**

These demands are to clean up the electoral roll,

reform postal voting, use indelible ink, establish a minimum campaign period of 21 days, ensure free and fair access to the media, strengthen public institutions, get rid of corruption and put a stop to dirty politics.

The recent attacks against BERSIH 2.0, including personal attacks and threats against its Chairperson, Ambiga Sreenevasan, must be condemned. As a human rights defender and a woman who has achieved much in her career, including being a pioneer member of WAO and becoming the President of the Bar Council, Ambiga has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to social justice.

As a leader with a strong social conscience, Ambiga is to be commended for her tireless work, which is not for personal gain, but for the betterment of

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Malaysia and its electoral system. Unfortunately, many other leaders in this country cannot be said to have the same drive to make positive changes to our country.

## **Everyone who calls Malaysia home cannot dispute the need for clean, free and fair elections.**



And these free and fair elections must be accompanied with access to clear and impartial information from the media, in order for all Malaysian voters to make an informed choice at the ballot box. The biased reporting of the mainstream media insults the intelligence of Malaysians, who must be given the chance to decide for themselves the merits of each candidate based on their policies.

Malaysia's Federal Constitution, our nation's guiding framework, enshrines the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, and the right to assemble peaceably.

WAO will be exercising this constitutional right by walking with BERSIH 2.0 on 9 July and we encourage all to come and support the call for a vibrant and transparent democracy for Malaysia.

## **BERSIH 2.0**

**The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections or Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil**

BERSIH started out as the Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform, which was formed in July 2005, and the coalition's objective was to push for a thorough reform of the electoral process in Malaysia.

### **The formulation of the Joint Communique**

The Joint Communique was a result of an 'Electoral Reform Workshop' held in Kuala Lumpur in September 2006. The Joint Communique defines the long-term objectives and the immediate working goals of the coalition.

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (better known by its Bahasa Malaysia name "BERSIH") issued its first joint communiqué on 23 November 2006. At its formation, BERSIH comprised civil society organisations and political parties with the objective of campaigning for clean and fair elections in Malaysia.

### **BERSIH Steering Committee**

The original Committee comprised members from civil society, including from the following NGOs: Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram), Women's Development Collective (WDC) and Writers Alliance for Media Independence (WAMI).

### **BERSIH in 2007**

BERSIH's journey thus far has been both monumental and memorable. The public demonstration of November 2007, which saw thousands of ordinary Malaysians take to the streets in support of clean and fair elections, was a critical juncture in our nation's electoral journey.

Almost 3½ years later, the aims of BERSIH continue to be relevant.

### **Launch of BERSIH 2.0**

BERSIH was recently re-launched as BERSIH 2.0, a coalition of like minded civil society organisations unaffiliated to any political party. The aim will be to effectively monitor both sides of the political divide.



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BERSIH's calls are summarised in the following 8 points:

**1. Clean up the electoral roll**

The rakyat have a right to an electoral roll that is an accurate reflection of the voting population and not marred with irregularities.

**2. Reform postal ballot**

Postal ballot should not only be open for all Malaysian citizens living abroad, but also for those within the country who cannot be physically present in their voting constituency on polling day.

**3. Use of indelible ink**

BERSIH 2.0 demands for indelible ink to be used for all the upcoming elections. Failure to do so will lead to the inevitable conclusion that there is an intention to allow voter fraud.

**4. Minimum 21 days campaign period**

A longer campaign period would allow voters more time to gather information and deliberate on their choices. It will also allow candidates more time to disseminate information to rural areas.

**8. Stop dirty politics**

We demand for all political parties and politicians to put an end to gutter politics. As citizens and voters, we are not interested in gutter politics; we are interested in policies that affect the nation.

**7. Stop corruption**

BERSIH 2.0 and the rakyat demand for an end to all forms of corruption. Serious action must be taken against ALL allegations of corruption, including vote buying.

**6. Strengthen public institutions**

Public institutions such as the Judiciary, Attorney-General, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC), Police and the EC must be reformed to act independently, uphold laws and protect human rights.

**5. Free and fair access to media**

BERSIH 2.0 calls on the EC to press for all media agencies, especially state-funded media agencies such as Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) and Bernama to allocate proportionate and objective coverage for all political parties.



**Do you know?**

On 9 July 2011, Malaysians living abroad organised BERSIH rallies where they were. Peaceful demonstrations took place in Korea, Australia, Japan and USA (Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York).

After 9 July 2011, the work of BERSIH 2.0 continues. Check out [www.bersih.org](http://www.bersih.org) or Like [facebook.com/bersih2.0](https://www.facebook.com/bersih2.0) if you support clean and fair elections or you can follow like-minded people and read their BERSIH experience on [twitter.com/bersih](https://twitter.com/bersih)

## YOUNG FACES Sheeva Weil

My late grandmother was a formidable woman. Funny, kind, incredibly strong-minded, she had principles and stuck by them- one of which was that her grandchildren be allowed to do whatever they wanted, as long as they were happy.

You may know her -or rather, know of her, as she passed away almost 18 years ago- as Mrs B. She was one of the first counsellors in WAO, close friend of Shanti Dairiam and Ivy Josiah, and staunch supporter of women's rights.



Thus I grew up in a house which had a large sticker on the kitchen door, which said:

"Break the Silence, Stop Domestic Violence".

Thus I myself became a staunch supporter of equality between the sexes.

And thus it seemed only natural that during my summer holidays, the year I turned 19, I came to intern at WAO.

At the Refuge, where I spent most of my time, I designed the big posters for the "Walk A Mile in Her Shoes" campaign (and nearly burst with glee when I saw them carried around).

I taught the resident kids classes,

and overheard little *Farouk\** telling *Amir\** that Mars was the 2<sup>nd</sup> closest planet to the Sun, had *Iqbal\** correctly recite the capitals of Turkey, France, Myanmar... And I beamed with pride.

I played "Un Deux Trois Soleil" with *Nadya\** (who happens to have near-perfect French pronunciation!), after which she proceeded to give me a list of all the Hindi movies I absolutely *must* watch.

I played airplane with the little ones, spinning round and round and round...

I listened in on various shocking and saddening counselling sessions.

I went to a police station to accompany a battered wife; and ran to the grocery store to buy a kilo of onions for the women's cooking class.

I watched a woman cry as she recalled her late adoptive mother, a patient mother rock her infant as he wailed, another laugh in the sun.

At the Child Care Centre, I drew a big beach scene on the white board (and subsequently became the person to come to when one wanted to draw a coconut tree).

I had to climb onto the roof to get a runaway shuttlecock, only to find a family of skinny pussycats, much to the kids' delight.

I lent my favourite fantasy book series to young *Martin\**, who proceeded to devour all five books in less than a month, all the

while keeping me entertained with his sarcastic and intelligent diary entries.

Finally, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Centre, I experienced a little bit of WAO advocacy work...Hidup Rakyat!

I ate donuts in Taman Jaya Park whilst seeing men walk in heels.

I found out that there is a Malaysian High Commission in Nigeria- never know when that will come in handy!

And when I heard a strange and hilarious story involving my grandma and home-made tosaís, I just knew she'd been watching out for me.

Thanks, everyone, for an enlightening, entertaining, atypical, amazing, suspenseful, and just plain interesting internship. I've learnt a lot, both about legal issues, women's rights, teaching children, and of course about human nature. I've had an incredible time, and I'll miss you- both social workers and kids!

(And, Grandma? I know you're hanging around, watching out for me, and making my life that much crazier... I'm really grateful. Thanks!)

*\*Names are changed to protect the identity of the children*

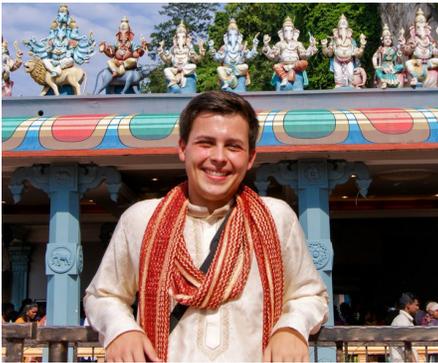


## YOUNG FACES Oliver Glasder

When Oliver Glasder first arrived in KL, his first thoughts were "Wow, it is *hot!*" Not an uncommon thought for a young European travelling to Asia for the first time... What was uncommon was the reason he had come: not as a tourist, only thinking of sandy white beaches and crystal clear waters, but as the second male intern at WAO. Malaysia was one of his three choices when he applied through the American Foreign Service (or AFS) - his aim was to leave

Germany for a while and discover a whole new culture.

This 19 year-old German national is now coming to the end of his year-long internship at the Child Care Centre. Over the past twelve months, he has learnt Malay, travelled around Asia, immersed himself in the Malaysian culture... And most importantly, he has become a mentor of sorts to the kids. They look to him as they would to their fathers or elder brothers- indeed; Oliver tells me he thinks it important for them (especially the boys) to have a good male role-model, so that they know that not all men behave in the same way.



Although at first, they compared him to Philipp, the first male intern, and even mistakenly called him that, he soon won them over with his relaxed attitude and easy charm. Now they go to "Ana Oli" for anything and everything!

Oliver has also had to work beneath two very different child care supervisors. From the more hands-on, go-with-your-gut-feeling Aunty Mary to Myra's more structured teaching and planning methods, they gave him a taste of what working with different bosses can be like. He's had good experiences, like preparing the children's play for the annual Christmas party (which although nerve-racking was apparently mostly a lot of fun); or going on the staff trip to Tioman Island (so he *did* get to see the white beaches and crystal waters!) And even though at times, working with the kids could get stressful or frustrating, he feels that he has become much, *much* more patient, and has learnt a lot about himself.

In the end, Oli will really be quite sad to leave KL, to go to university in Germany in order to study pharmacy. To quote him, Malaysia has become his "home". He'll miss the kids a lot, the helpful and friendly staff, the good friends he's made, the delicious *mamak* food, the *cuci mata* attitude...

And yes, he'll even miss the heat!

*Interviewed and written by Sheeva*

## UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Our WAO website is currently going under a revamp process. So before we launch our new and interactive website, we'd like to direct all our friends and supporters to our Facebook page.

At our Facebook page you'll get all the info that WAO is turning out, for example press statements and articles under our Notes section, updates on events and projects, news on gender issues locally and internationally as well as photos from past events (you'll know how much of fun you missed out on!).

You will also get to send us direct messages and be involved in discussion with our friends as well as the WAO team. We'll be sure to announce the launch of our new website on our Facebook too!

Click onto [www.facebook.com/wao.malaysia](http://www.facebook.com/wao.malaysia)

See you there!

## EVENTS & HAPPENINGS

**Walk and Rawk for Change** - NGOs in KL came together to organize a walk in conjunction with 100 years of International Women's Day. The walk started off from The Annexe and ended at the Chinese Assembly Hall. The police came to help stop traffic to ease the flow of participants when crossing the busy KL roads. It was not only a celebration of women but also a call to the government, parliamentarians and the people of Malaysia that there is still much to be accomplished in the arena of women's rights and gender equality and a reminder that we can be the change.



**One Man Lives the Dream** - Morgan Parker created Wheel2Wheel for the precise reason of raising money for 10 charities from 10 different countries through an amazing, once in a lifetime riding expedition through Australasia.

Starting off from Hong Kong he began his 250,000 km ride on 1 March 2011 and on 4 July 2011, Morgan's dream was realized as he ended his journey in Brisbane, Australia, a fitting homecoming. WAO is the chosen charity from Malaysia and had the pleasure of meeting Morgan and the W2W team in late April 2011. WAO applauds the efforts of a single man to make a

difference and thanks Morgan for letting WAO be a part of this amazing experience.

**Fashion with a Cause** - Lights, fashion, runway and WAO. Yes, you heard us right! Berrybow, founded by young entrepreneur Michelle Chong, launched its new line "Bright and Bold" in June 2011 and chose WAO as the charity beneficiary. Despite Berrybow being just 3 months old, the event was a success with the new line modeled by Amber Chia and models from Amber Chia Academy and of course some of our amazing WAO staff! A huge thank you to Michelle Chong, who worked so hard and closely with WAO and continues to be a good friend to WAO. We look forward to more collaborations with Berrybow!



**Men Walk the Talk in Heels** - The Pixel Project and WAO came together yet again to collaborate on another event that called all men to walk in heels as a public awareness stunt on domestic violence. Held on Father's Day (19 June 2011) at Amcorp Mall and Taman Jaya, men from all ages and walks of life came together on a Sunday morning, donned their heels and walked to the beat of bagpipes and a dhol for women's rights and a violent free home.

About 30 men participated in the walk and were a sporting bunch. They even helped each other step down from some precarious stairs. All funds from the event went towards raising

money for WAO and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) through the purchase of pixels.

A big thank you to our sponsors Academy of Pastry Arts, Dunkin' Donuts, Permais Sdn Bhd, Giant and Princess Shoes. Last but definitely not least, a warm thank you to our participants, without which the event would not have been a success.



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**Yayasan Sime Darby** - WAO would like to take this chance to thank Yayasan Sime Darby who have come back to support WAO's financial need for another two years.

A total of RM 720,000.00 (a doubled amount from last year) will be donated as announced at a press conference in June 2011.

Yayasan Sime Darby's generous donation to WAO is under the banner of its Community Development program to promote community wellbeing.

**WAO Annual General Meeting 2011** - The election of a new EXCO Committee was carried out during WAO's 28<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting in May 2011. WAO extends our warmest welcome to our 2 new EXCO Committee members for 2011-2013; Assistant Treasurer, Kon Cze Yan and Committee Member, Kerina Francis and congratulations to our new President Mok Chuang Lian.

WAO also thanks the EXCO Committee of 2009-2011 for their dedication, support and commitment to WAO.

## WISHLIST

**BASIC NEEDS:** Toilet paper, baby diapers (small & medium), shampoo, sanitary pads, stand fan

**HOUSEHOLD NEEDS:** Brooms, Clorox, tea bags, coffee, Dutch lady milk (Step 1 & 2), detergent, rice, insect repellent, Planta, cooking oil, condensed milk, canned sardines, Maggi instant noodles, mee hoon (Vermicelli)

## Terima Kasih!

The expenses of the organization including staffing, cost for food, medical needs, rent, transport, utilities and upkeep of the Refuge and Child Care Centre total up to RM1 million yearly. Thank you for your donations that enable us to continue serving women and children including promoting their rights.

## The Women of WAO

### President

Mok Chuang Lian

### Executive Director

Ivy Josiah

### Social Work Manager

Wong Su Zane

### Vice President

Vivienne Lee

### Finance & Admin Manager

Sharmini Kanesamoorthy

### Social Workers

Jessie Ang

Nazlina Abd Ghani

Umadevi Rajah Denram

Noor Diyana Yahaya

Puveshini Rao Subaramanian

### Secretary

Chin Oy Sim

### Admin & Account Assistant

Divvyanthini Manoharan

### Asst Secretary

Lee Shook Fong

### Administrator

Ammy Juliet

### CCC Supervisor

Myra Zafia

### Treasurer

Carol Chin

### Projects Officers

Ann Nicole Nunis

Vivian Yap

### CCC Child Minders

Saraswathy Balakrishnan

Anastasia

Sumathi P. Annavee

### Assistant Treasurer

Kon Cze Yan

### Programme Officer

Sarah Thwaites

### Committee Members

Meera Samanther

Grace Lim

Kerina Francis