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Marina says young Malaysian women are informed and aware in the area of women's rights. — Picture by Mukhriz Hazim

MARINA TELLS IT LIKE IT IS



By Melanie Chalil
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DATIN Paduka Marina Mahathir is a household name for many.

Through the years, she has been at the forefront of fighting for the downtrodden and human rights.

She is also a fighter for advancing the rights of women.

She proudly declares the road to progress has always been led by women.

"Generally speaking, women are doing very well. We are out there working. We are educated. There are more women in universities than there are men."

The activist said she was optimistic of young Malaysian women leading the way in closing the gender gap and ensure their rights continue to be protected.

"Young women these days are very aware — the term used these days is 'woke'. They are very awake and alert to things happening around them.

"They study so hard, why should they be paid less than a guy? Why should they not get the job because they're the wrong sex? They see the injustice in all this and they won't put up with it."

Marina has always been known for her outspokenness.

This is evident from her newspaper column entries, postings on her blog and social media, and the many media statements she has made, including during the time when she was Malaysian AIDS Council president.

She said although Malaysia has come a long way, more work needed to be done to safeguard women's rights and safety and ensure milestones, such as the Domestic Violence Act, are not reversed.

She is also concerned about issues such as child marriage and women's experiences in courts.

"Women always have the most to lose and when things start moving backwards, we lose even more, which is why women are the most motivated to fight for our rights."

Marina said women's rights was a work in progress for all nations, young or old.

"There is no country in the world that can claim complete equality for men and women, other countries have a lot to do as well.

"The US for instance, has suffered a lot of setbacks recently so they have a lot of work to do and so do we."

While the mother of two is no stranger to tedious advocacy work, she said fun and creative methods of raising awareness were the best ways to make "heavy" subjects palatable.

"Sometimes people don't want bad news coming at them. They also want to find change inspirational and a lighter way in dealing with those issues."

An example of this is when Marina and her team at Zafigo — a travel website for women — held three days of workshops and talks at the George Town Festival that saw a panel of women travellers share their unique experiences.

While travel has become cheaper and more accessible, leading to more women being able to take advantage of it, it was still very much a gendered undertaking.

"When we give women the knowledge for them to travel safely and confidently, they come back with this 'I did it!' sense of achievement."

Marina, who was born in 1957 and turned 60 in May, said Malaysians have a lot to assess and reflect on as the six decades of independence are celebrated.

"We have come a long way and I don't

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— Marina

think we can go too far back but there are certainly people wanting to push us back."

Has the nation aged gracefully in its senior years?

"Right now, I think it feels like me. You turn 60 and everything aches," she joked.

"We love this country and we want to see it succeed and progress. It's not just going to fall into our laps easily — we have to work for it.