

GENDER EQUALITY : WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Organised by
The Baha'i Office for the Advancement of Women
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Gender Equality : What does it take and whose problem is it were some of the questions discussed at the table talk organised by The Baha'i Office for the Advancement of Women of the Baha'i community of Malaysia. Five young adults; men and women from various backgrounds shared their perspectives on the status of the advancement of women as well as the progress towards gender equality in Malaysia and globally.



Chong Wei Shern sharing his thoughts

Chong Wei Shern, a scriptwriter and game designer said that we have to regard men and women as individuals who each have the potential to contribute towards the betterment of society. "How we value and treat each other is a matter of choice - a choice that could positively impact or be detrimental to society", he said.

"It's not about giving women equal rights and opportunities in the current failing social system," said Alison Arul, a manager with a international NGO. "We need to reconsider social values and structures if we wish to advance the progress towards gender equality. We need to consider developing social structures and principles that will enable and engage the full potential and both women and men".



from left, participants Martin and Jen Yee

Sonia Ong, a lawyer and Chairperson of the Youth Commission of the National Council of Women's Organisations touched on the aspect of cultural relativism. "There are cultural practices and traditions that are prejudicial and in some way harmful towards women and girls. People need to reflect on their own cultural values and determine what changes are to be made," she said.

Sharmila Theena, a marketing and communications manager, talked about the imperative need to consider women's economic contribution towards the prosperity of a nation. "How can we ensure that women participate more fully in all fields of work, that men become more active in the work of caring and nurturing and that the values underpinning such work are carried to other arenas of society?" she asked.



Presenters, Sonia Ong (front left) and Sharmila Theena (standing)

The final presenter, Juan Saw, a human resources manager, asserted that true equality between men and women will not be established unless prevailing conceptions of power that dominate contemporary thought are seriously questioned and fundamentally redefined. "Let's consider other sources of power available such as unity, justice and equity, knowledge, integrity and love - powers humanity has been learning to draw

upon over the centuries. Expressions of power from these sources can be seen in the capacity to work creatively and constructively with others, the capacity to cooperate and transform social reality to bring about gender equality"

The participants, both young men and women were engaged with the presenters in the discussion which raised many questions about our perceptions of human identity and social reality in relation to the role of women and men as well as society in advancing towards gender equality.



“The workshop was a great eye opener to the current issues we still have with gender equality,” shared Jen Yee, a young adult participant. Her friend Martin added, “It gave me a different perspective on how we can address these issues to achieve true equality and peaceful co-existence for both genders”. Another participant, Padmini found it enlightening to have people from diverse backgrounds discussing how all could play a part in achieving gender equality. “I loved that it was not about women’s rights alone but how both genders could benefit from a society that treats both genders equally – it was a great discussion!” she said.

The event provided the much needed social space for young adults who are concerned about the issue to frankly discuss and see how as individuals they can do **WHAT IT TAKES** in their personal circles of influence to advance the progress of gender equality.