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Govts should focus on helping women affected by climate change: Nurul Izzah

Environmental policies must consider 'gendered dimension' of problem, says PKR vice-president

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Nurul Izzah Anwar, who is also Permatang Pauh MP, says that Malaysians have seen how gender, poverty, and the recent flooding events across multiple states in Malaysia intersect. – The Vibes file pic, August 1, 2022

GEORGE TOWN – It is now time for governments to focus on finding solutions for women affected by climate change as many of them have been displaced by the consequences of severe and deadlier weather patterns, said PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar.

She said that there is now a “gendered dimension” to the issue of climate change, and environmental policies must take this into consideration.

In certain countries within the global south, poor women must walk greater distances to obtain fresh water for their families.

With climate change, such basic necessities are becoming increasingly scarce, said Nurul Izzah when delivering her keynote address at the Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership here.

The three-day programme is hosted by Wawasan Open University (WOU) at its George Town city campus today before it moves to the Park Royal Resort for the remaining two days.

Among the dignitaries present were Commonwealth of Learning (COL) president and CEO Prof Asha Kanwar, WOU vice-chancellor and CEO Prof Lily Chan, Asia e-University president and CEO Prof Datuk Ansary Ahmed, and COL acting director (skills) Frances Ferreira.

Speaking via a video feed, Nurul Izzah, who is also Permatang Pauh MP, said that Malaysians have seen how gender, poverty, and the recent flooding events across multiple states in Malaysia intersect.

“Though certain parts of Malaysia are known to be flood-prone during the monsoon months, the flooding events of this last year were particularly severe in their sheer frequency and ferocity.

“This was no ‘natural’ disaster, this was the impact of climate change on our shores happening right in front of our eyes. During the worst of the floods, entire homes and vehicles were swept away, furniture and belongings were destroyed.

“Displaced victims were unable to go to work or school, and some were exposed to post-flood diseases during the ensuing clean-ups. Though homes of the rich and poor alike were submerged, it was the poorest segments which were hit hardest,” she said.

She stressed that women find it most difficult to recover after such disasters.

Applying a gendered lens, even for environmental disasters, it is crucial for truly sustainable solutions to be formulated and ultimately executed, Nurul Izzah stressed.

As leaders, women should be equipped with the important knowledge of “green skills” to adapt to the harsh impacts of climate change.

“We need knowledge on the causes of a warming climate, and also a strong set of skills that will allow us to apply our knowledge in the real world, including problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, coping with uncertainty, empathy, and negotiation,” she said.

Nurul Izzah also spoke about sustaining the momentum to make gender equality relevant and meaningful over the long term instead of just a short-term initiative.

“There was an understanding that the Women (Family and Community Development) Ministry alone would not be able to carry the herculean task of ensuring gender equality and promoting gender sensitivity within the country – it should be a priority for every leader, in government or otherwise, regardless of their portfolio,” Nurul Izzah said. – The Vibes, August 1, 2022