

MALAYSIA

Awards for bigots

Those who call out sexism are often accused of not being able to ‘take a joke’. But in Malaysia, a coalition of women’s rights groups is providing some light relief.

The annual AiyohWatLah! Awards expose sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia from public figures and institutions. The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) started the event

in 2012 after years of being asked for responses to sexism. ‘How many times can you say “we are deeply concerned”?’ says Ivy Josiah of JAG. ‘We were seen as a feminist group without a sense of humour.’

This year’s ‘crop of bigotry’ awards took place on 10 May, hosted by popular comedian Ribena Berry. The public voted in seven categories, including: Foot in Mouth, Least Helpful to the Sisterhood and Enough Already.

Nominations for ‘Insulting Intelligence’ included politician Ismail Kijo’s claims that if same-sex marriage were legalized, mothers would be ‘forced to face the harsh possibility’ their daughters’ partners ‘could have bigger breasts than theirs’.

In 2013, AiyohWatLah! came close to cancellation when venue managers got last-minute cold feet. ‘They said we couldn’t do it – it’s too political, too critical of leaders. That’s when we realized this is really having an impact.’ Josiah wants AiyohWatLah! to go global: ‘It’s tackling an old problem in a new, creative, funny way. Laughter is always good.’ ■

globalized economy that for a mother to be a good one, in terms of providing for her children and giving them a chance in life, it was necessary for her to take herself far away from them. I wanted to explore the survival economics – but also the emotional economics – of this. Was it worth it? At what point would a woman decide the price was just too high? ... There was also the delicate matter of health demands in her own country. Was she not very much more needed there?’ Read her account at nin.tl/migrantstory ■

Chris Brazier