

 KUALA LUMPUR: Employers must take sexual harassment reports seriously because it is an act that cannot be tolerated, said Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

She said employees should be informed of their rights to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

Firstly, many victims view sexual harassment as something that is too personal. Secondly, sexual harassment is not easily proven. Thirdly, it has become a norm that a majority of victims of sexual harassment seem to think that they are being punished and judged.

They suffer in silence, she told reporters after presenting welfare aid amounting to RM60,000 to 170 recipients, including the disabled at the Gombak Social Welfare Office yesterday.

Employees are also reluctant to report such cases because they are afraid of the risk of being terminated, she said when asked to comment on the low number of sexual harassment cases reported, despite the introduction of the voluntary Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in 1999.

At the launch of a seminar on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in conjunction with Sexual Harassment Week, which began yesterday, Labour Department director-general Datuk Ismail Abdul Rahim had said that the introduction of a sexual harassment statute could lead to a dull and rigid environment in the workplace.

Ismail had also said that the code, which was adopted voluntarily by companies was sufficient to curb sexual harassment.

Commenting on Muntik Bani, the Indonesian maid who died of alleged abuse in Klang, Shahrizat said proper punishment should be meted out against the alleged abuser as soon as possible.

She added that a few employers had given Malaysia a bad name by their acts of brutality and cruelty to their foreign maids.

Muntik was rescued by police from a house in Taman Sentosa on Oct 20 with severe wound on her leg as well as bruises on her arms and face. She died last Monday.

Earlier, Shahrizat said the Social Welfare Department had begun handing out aid to eligible recipients, including those with disabilities or illness and the elderly.