

## Malaysia's Sisters of Islam win right to use name

(AFP) – 29 Oct 2010

KUALA LUMPUR — A Malaysian court ruled Friday that a vocal women's rights group could use the name "Sisters in Islam", rejecting a complaint by religious activists that the title was confusing to Muslims.



*Malaysia's first two female judges Suraya Ramli (right) and Radidah Abdul Razak, make their way to the press conference room in Putrajaya in July.*

An advocate for women's rights for over two decades, Sisters in Islam (SIS) drew controversy early this year for speaking out against the caning of three Muslim women under religious sharia laws that ban sex out of wedlock.

The High Court turned down a lawsuit by the Malaysian Assembly of Mosque Youth, saying the religious group had no legal standing to file the complaint, SIS said in a statement.

"The decision... is a positive step towards ensuring that freedom of expression as guaranteed under the federal constitution is upheld," SIS programme manager Ratna Osman said.

"SIS maintains that our work has always been based on a strong belief in Islam as a source of justice and equality," she added, describing the complaint as "frivolous and scandalous".

A court official, who declined to be named, confirmed the ruling to AFP.

The religious activists argued Sisters in Islam was contravening the law by not using its legally registered title -- SIS Forum Malaysia -- and that it was a pressure group for women's rights, not a Muslim organisation.

"We will file an appeal," Taquiuddin Abdullah, the youth group's executive director told AFP, confirming that the high court struck out its case.

"We are urging the religious authorities to take up a case since they have the legal standing. Sisters in Islam has caused much confusion on questions of religion based on their interpretation," he added.

Sisters in Islam described the caning of the three women in February -- a legal first in the country -- as "degrading and unjust treatment", saying it constituted further discrimination against Muslim women in Malaysia.

Its condemnation prompted religious authorities in the Muslim-majority nation to lodge a police report that led to SIS officials being questioned over the matter.

Malaysia, which is also home to large ethnic Chinese and Indian communities, has a dual-track legal system. Islamic courts can try Muslims for religious and moral offences, including illicit sex and drinking.

Muslim groups have been growing increasingly assertive, raising claims that Malaysia is being "Islamised" and that the rights of the ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities are being eroded.