

SPECIAL ADDRESS

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF MALAYSIA

DATUK SERI PANGLIMA WAN AHMAD FARID WAN SALLEH

on the occasion of

BAR COUNCIL WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONFERENCE 2026

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Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh
and a very good morning.

YBhg. Tun Tengku Maimum binti Tuan Mat

President of the ASEAN Law Association;
Former Chief Justice of Malaysia

YA Datin Paduka Evrol Mariette Peters

Court of Appeal Judge;
Chairperson, ASEAN Law Association Standing Committee for Women In
Law

Mr Anand Raj

President of the Malaysian Bar

Miss Marisa Regina

Chairperson of Bar Council Women's Rights Committee

My brother and sister judges

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

1. I am honoured to have been invited to deliver this special address at a conference whose theme speaks with both elegance and intention — Together We Create PowHER.
2. Four words. And yet within them, a complete philosophy.
3. There is the word *together* — which tells us immediately that, this conference is not a solitary pursuit. It is a collective one. It requires more than one voice, more than one perspective, more than one seat at the table.
4. There is the word *create* — active, forward-looking, deliberate. Not merely to observe, or to discuss, or to document. But to build something. To leave something behind that was not there before.
5. And then there is *PowHER* — that inspired piece of wordplay that manages, in a single word, to speak both to power in its broadest sense, and to name precisely whose power we are gathered here to champion.
6. When I first encountered this word, I smiled. It is clever. But more than clever — it is precise. It takes a word we all know, a word that has not always been equally distributed, and it recentres it. It says: power is not only something held. It is something created, claimed, shared, and multiplied. And when it is given its proper expression — when women lead, advocate, adjudicate, innovate, and shape the institutions around them — it does not diminish the power of others. It expands what power is capable of achieving for everyone.
7. This year's conference theme reflects a continuing commitment to redefining women's success beyond traditional frameworks — while strengthening leadership, celebrating achievement, and confronting

the systemic barriers that stand between us and a society that is more just, more inclusive, and more equitable for all.

8. That is not a modest ambition. But then, it should not be.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. The judiciary is often described as the last bastion of justice — and Malaysia has ensured that bastion is built on the shoulders of its finest, regardless of gender. I am proud to say that all four top positions in our judiciary were once held by women — not in succession, not by design, but by merit, by courage, and by the simple, undeniable truth that talent knows no gender.
10. We had our first female Chief Justice, Tun Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat — a judge whose name has become synonymous with independence, integrity, and the quiet, unwavering courage it takes to lead an entire institution through turbulent times. Our first female President of the Court of Appeal, Tan Sri Rohana Yusuf, who helmed the second highest court in the land with the same steadiness and distinction that has come to define the women of our bench. Our first female Chief Judge of Malaya, Tan Sri Siti Norma Yaakob — the one who first broke the glass ceiling, walking through doors not just for herself, but for every woman who would follow, ensuring those doors would never be closed again. And our first female Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak, Datuk Hajah Azizah Nawawi, who in 2025 completed what history had been quietly building towards — a judiciary whose highest offices had, at one remarkable moment, all been entrusted to women.

11. The glass ceiling was not merely shattered once — it was shattered four times, and counting. And each time it broke, it did not break quietly. It broke with a gavel, in a courtroom, on the strength of a judgment. These are not just names in a list of appointments. They are proof — written into the highest offices of our land — that justice, when given a woman's hand, does not falter. It leads.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Justice is not only what happens in a courtroom. It is what happens in the culture of our institutions, in the composition of our leadership, and in the daily experience of every professional who walks through our doors.

13. To give you some context on my life - I have 6 daughters — and before anything else is said, let me be clear: they are, without question, the greatest blessing of my life.

14. Between the six of them, they have chosen paths that span the breadth of what it means to contribute to society. My eldest is an actuary — a profession that demands a level of mathematics that is frankly offensive to me. Unlike Lord Denning, I am never good at mathematics. Neither is their mother. My wife and I usually need a calculator to split a lunch bill. Where exactly that gene came from remains, to this day, one of the great unsolved mysteries of our household. Another has gone into engineering, building things her father could not begin to explain. One has carved a path in mass communications, and another has found her vocation as a documentary film producer — telling stories that the world needs to

hear including not to eat sharks fin soup or turtle eggs. And yes, two have followed me into the law, which I find to be unbelievable. It is a living proof that lightning actually does, unfortunately, strike twice.

15. Not one of them defined herself by expectation. Each one created her own headline, in her own voice, on her own time. And I say that not merely as a proud father — though I am, immensely — but also as a father who give each of them the freedom to find their own way. I never imposed. I never directed. I never said — this is what a daughter of mine should become. Because I believe, with every conviction I hold, that the greatest disservice a parent — or indeed a society — can do to a young woman is to hand her a life she did not choose and call it guidance.
16. Each of my daughters found her own calling. And each is flourishing in it. That, to me, is the very definition of PowHER — not power handed down from above, but potential unlocked from within. And it should not require an unusually open-minded father to make that possible. It should be the norm. In our homes, in our institutions, in our laws, and in our culture — women must be free to become exactly who they are, not who we imagined them to be. Women professionals should dictate their destiny and be successful at that.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will leave you with this.

17. Together We Create PowHER is not merely a theme for today. It is a responsibility that extends well beyond this room, beyond this conference, and beyond this day. It is a call — to each of us, in

whatever capacity we serve — to do our part. Consistently. Courageously. And without waiting to be asked.

18. The work of building a world that is genuinely equal, genuinely just, and genuinely worthy of the women in it — that work does not end when this conference does. It continues in the decisions we make, the cultures we shape, and the example we set for those who come after us.
19. As a judge, I have always believed that the true measure of any system of justice is not how it treats the powerful — but how it protects and uplifts those who have been overlooked for far too long.
20. Today, we reaffirm that commitment. Together.

Thank you for having me.