NO TO RAPE

ABOLISH MARITAL-RAPE EXEMPTION IN ITS ENTIRETY.

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** Chairperson of Aware Penal Code Review Committee**
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I COMMEND Dr Andy Ho for his timely and eloquent commentary, 'Rape is rape, so husbands should not have immunity' (ST, Oct 2).

The Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) submitted its position paper on the proposed Penal Code amendments to the Government last December. A copy is available online at http://www.aware.org.sg/content/view/131/217/.

The results of an online poll on our website indicate that over 78 per cent of respondents (out of a total of 900) thought that the marital-rape exemption should be abolished without exception, with a further 10 per cent thinking that it should be abolished in certain sets of circumstances, but wider than those proposed. That means that 800 out of 900 respondents of the survey believed that the law should be changed to accord married women the same, or almost the same, rights as women not married to their rapists.

Several other misconceptions about marital rape are worth highlighting. First, marital rape is not uncommon. In Malaysia, a study by the group, All Women's Action Society, for the years 2000-2002 showed that 52 per cent of women who had experienced domestic violence were raped by their husbands. There have not been any published statistics for Singapore.

Another argument put forward against criminalising marital rape is that it would be difficult to prove it. However, despite concerns about enforcement and evidence, prostitution of minors outside Singapore will be criminalised, as will organising child-sex tours.

Furthermore, incest and acquaintance rape are offences under the Penal Code.

Finally, it must be remembered that rape is violence, not sex. Nobody is asking for scrutiny into a couple's private lives. But forced sex is not about sex; it is the exploitation of an imbalance of power.

We urge the Government to abolish the marital-rape exemption in its entirety.