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HKU legal scholar Puja Kapai receives Global Pluralism Award for advocacy work on behalf of marginalized groups in Hong Kong

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Ms Puja Kapai, an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), has won the prestigious 2021 Global Pluralism Award from the Global Centre for Pluralism, an international research and education centre in Canada. The Award celebrates exemplary achievements in building more inclusive societies where diversity is protected. Ms Kapai received the award for her research, advocacy, and mobilization in the advancement of the equal rights of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities, women and children.

"I am most humbled to receive the Global Pluralism Award," Kapai said. "By honouring my work in advancing social justice in relation to race, gender and minority rights, the Award renders visible the lived realities of all those who are routinely marginalised and experience systemic exclusion and discrimination in nearly every sphere of life. The Award also signals the responsibilities we each carry to begin the journey of inclusion, acceptance and pluralism at home."

Ms Kapai is an academic, lawyer and social justice advocate who challenges gendered and racialised cultural norms. An HKU alum who grew up in Hong Kong, she is also Convenor of the HKU Women's Studies Research Centre, which advocates around issues of gender, sexuality and diversity, as well as Director of the Faculty's Social Justice Summer Internship program which partners with students and NGOs working on gender-based violence, human trafficking and migration, ethnic minorities, children's rights and COVID-19 related inequalities to conduct research and develop related recommendations to drive policy change. Growing up as an ethnic minority child in racially homogenous Hong Kong, Kapai faced barriers to education from an early age; these experiences inspired her to break these barriers as an advocate, attorney, and legal scholar.

Kapai has drawn unprecedented attention to the status of women and ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, including contributing to the abolition of racially segregated schools for ethnic minority children, driving policy change among frontline responders to ethnic minority victims of domestic violence and child abuse. Kapai's comprehensive report on the Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong brought together extensive data to present, for the first time, how the systemic nature of



racial discrimination is embedded across multiple domains such as education, employment, and housing. Her work demonstrates the importance of looking at interlocking factors such as gender, race, age, or immigration status, showcasing the need for an intersectional approach to understand the root causes of inequalities in Hong Kong. Her recommendations based on her groundbreaking research on Help-Seeking Behaviours Among Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence have been incorporated into training for frontline responders to domestic violence, with additional funding and outreach centres to address the specific needs of ethnic minority communities. Her most recent research, *Doing Equality Consciously*, uncovers the prevalence of unconscious bias in Hong Kong, the first such study to be conducted in an Asian context, and details recommendations on how to break such biases to build more equitable societies.

She is the first awardee from Hong Kong and only the second from Asia. Ms Kapai also was awarded the International Women of Courage Hong Kong Award in 2015 for the community-based impact of her work in addressing gender-based violence and more recently, she was recognised by the American Chamber of Commerce as the 2019 Women of Influence Professional of the Year for her work in advancing equality for Hong Kong's marginalized communities.

In her Acceptance Speech for the Award, Kapai said: "This Award enables minority women like me to be seen as empowered agents for change, both within and outside our communities. As minority women, we often fall through the cracks due to intersectional dimensions of our identity which are inadequately captured by narratives of racism or sexism alone. Powerful people and systems invisibilise women of colour, glossing over the structural barriers we face, diminishing our agency and voice. We are portrayed as vulnerable, inviting 'saviours' who counsel us to stay in our lanes. This Award demonstrates that the road is ours to conquer."

Joe Clark, former Prime Minister of Canada and Chair of the Award Jury, said: "The jury is delighted to be recognizing the 2021 Global Pluralism Award winners, selected from amongst hundreds of submissions. They are examples of what contagious change can be inspired by the creative and human instinct of pluralism, of acting together rather than apart."

Meredith Preston McGhie, Secretary General of the Global Centre for Pluralism, emphasized the importance of the award in these "times of great division and inequity," she said: "We need to push back against these trends. The 2021 Awardees offer us tangible and innovative examples of pluralism in action. They demonstrate courage and creativity in the face of extraordinary challenges and in times of conflict and crisis. Their stories have the capacity to inspire us to action towards pluralism in our own spaces. The Centre is deeply honoured to be supporting their work."

The Global Pluralism Award is presented once every two years to individuals, organizations, and governments around the world for exemplary achievements in building more inclusive societies where diversity is protected. For 2021, the Global



Centre for Pluralism received 500 nominations spanning 70 countries and chose three winners. Nominees undergo a rigorous review process and are selected by an independent, international jury of experts from disciplines related to pluralism.

For more on Ms Kapai's work, please visit:

<http://researchblog.law.hku.hk/search/label/Puja%20Kapai> and

<https://www.wsrcweb.hku.hk/search-results?q=puja+kapai>.

To view the 2021 Global Pluralism Award Virtual Ceremony, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvZNz5FzKbM>. (Introduction to Ms Puja Kapai starts at 30:08; Acceptance speech starts at 39:06)