

## Use legitimate ways to push tudung issue: MP

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A MEMBER of Parliament has criticised the way in which some have tried to push for the wearing of the Muslim headscarf at the workplace.

Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Zaqy Mohamad said an online petition championing the cause and which allows fake e-mail addresses to be used to show solidarity was the wrong way of engaging in public issues.

Criticising this practice of "astro-turfing" in a Facebook post yesterday, Mr Zaqy said there are legitimate and constructive ways to engage the Government, such as through ministers and MPs.

The petition's initiator has also chosen to remain anonymous.

It was started on Oct 12 on online campaigning site [avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org) by a "Syafiqah K." and aimed to garner 20,000 signatures. It was taken down recently with only 12,405 signatures.

Citing articles this week by The New Paper and Berita Harian on the issue, Mr Zaqy said it was unfortunate that the petition, after coming under the spotlight, had been withdrawn.

The chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Communications and Information added: "The initiator has not identified himself or herself. So no one knows who initiated it, or whether the response is real."

Astro-turfing, said new media watcher Carol Soon of the Institute of Policy Studies, adds to online clutter and noise. "It potentially distracts authorities and individuals who are genuinely concerned with an issue and advocating a cause," she told The Straits Times.

The headscarf issue was most recently raised at a forum on race last month. A polytechnic lecturer asked why nurses were barred from wearing tudungs, sparking a discussion on whether front-line officers in Singapore should be allowed to.

A committee tasked to collect feedback on the concerns of the Malay/Muslim community had also raised the issue in July.

The Suara Musyawarah committee, which Mr Zaqy cited as an example of how the community could engage the Government on such causes, pointed out that many girls coming out of madrasahs would work as nurses if they could wear the headscarf. The reason given for not allowing this is that tudungs are not part of nurses' uniforms.