

Women's Commission

Information Note on
the Fifty-Ninth Session of the United Nations Commission on the
Status of Women

Introduction

This paper reports on the participation of the Women's Commission (WoC) at the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) from 9 to 11 March 2015 in New York.

Background

2. UNCSW is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. It is the principal global policy-making body on women's issues. Every year, representatives of Member States gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide. UNCSW normally meets for a period of 10 working days each year in early March.

The 59th Session of UNCSW

3. The 59th Session of CSW was held from 9 to 20 March 2015 in New York. The main focus of the Session was on the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), including current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Session also addressed opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.

4. The China delegation was led by Madam SONG Xiuyan, Vice-Chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). Mrs Stella LAU, WoC Chairperson, Ms Doris CHEUNG, Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1 (DS(W)1), and Mr Syrus TSUI, Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare attended the first three days of the meeting as part of the China delegation.

5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr BAN Ki-moon spoke at the opening of the 59th Session of CSW. He stressed that 2015 was a vital year for advancing the cause of gender equality as it marked the 20th year since BPFA was endorsed. Mr BAN called for all stakeholders, including Member States and women's groups, to work together to achieve gender equality and reiterated that UN Women would not cease its support and efforts put on this cause.

6. Following the Secretary-General's opening statement, participants including representatives of Member States, United Nations entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from all regions of the world shared the progress of the implementation of BPFA in their respective regions, as well as stressed on the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering women at the meeting. A series of parallel events were organised by Member States and NGOs to provide additional opportunities for exchange of information and sharing of experience and best practices.

7. DS(W)1 made a statement at the “round table with ministerial participation” entitled “National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change” on behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG). She shared with participants HKSARG’s efforts in achieving gender equality such as providing equal access to education and the healthcare system for both men and women. DS(W)1 also shared the latest development of women in Hong Kong as announced in the Policy Address 2015. (The points deployed by DS(W)1 in her statement are at **Annex**). Other participants of the round table also shared how they achieved gender equality by means of national mechanisms. Some participants shared the difficulties they faced in advancing women’s status in their respective countries.

Meetings and Visits in New York

8. The opportunity was also taken by the HKSAR participants as referred to in paragraph 4 above to establish contact with women’s groups and NGOs that provide services to women in New York City, as well as individuals who are dedicated to advancing women’s well-being. The following meetings and visits were arranged:

(i) *Meeting with Ms Gale BREWER, President of the Manhattan Borough, New York City on 9 March 2015*

- Ms Gale BREWER was elected the 27th Manhattan Borough President in 2014. She is responsible for advising the Mayor, Bill de Blasio, and City Council on borough concerns. Ms BREWER served in the City Government in various roles before being elected the Borough President, including the Executive Director of the Mayor’s Commission on the Status of Women in 1993 – 1994.

- During the meeting, issues such as women's employment and child care services were discussed. Views on the status of women in New York City and that of women in Hong Kong were also exchanged.

(ii) *Speaker Lunch Hosted by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York on 10 March 2015*

- WoC Chairperson spoke on the latest development of women in Hong Kong, as well as WoC's work focus at the lunch. WoC Chairperson and DS(W)1 also exchanged views with the participants on a number of topics, including women's employment, child care services, women's participation in boards, etc. There were about 50 participants at the lunch coming from a range of backgrounds, including leaders and representatives of women's groups, senior female executives in the business and professional sectors, and academics.

(iii) *Meeting with the NYC Administration for Children's Services on 10 March 2015*

- NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) is a New York City's agency that protects and promotes the safety and well-being of New York City's children, young people, families, and communities by providing child welfare, juvenile justice, and early care and education services.
- There was a meeting with Ms Lorelei VERGAS, Deputy Commissioner of ACS, and Mr James BOYD, Intergovernmental Affairs Associate of ACS.

(iv) *Meeting with Dress for Success on 11 March 2015*

- Dress for Success is a not-for-profit organisation founded in New York City in 1998 to address to the needs of low-income women who are seeking employment and self-sufficiency. The mission of Dress for Success is to promote the economic independence of disadvantaged women by providing professional attire, a network of support and the career development tools to help women in work and in life.
- There was a meeting with Ms Joi GORDON, CEO of Dress for Success, and Ms Liz CAREY, Executive Vice President, Affiliate Relations & Information Technology of Dress for Success.

(v) *Luncheon Meeting with Ms Gisela WURM, Member of Parliament of Austria on 11 March 2015*

- WoC Chairperson and DS(W)1 had a luncheon meeting with Ms WURM, who also attended the 59th Session of CSW in her capacity as the member of the National Parliament of Austria, to exchange views on women's employment and women's social participation in Hong Kong and Austria.

Networking with ACWF

9. The Hong Kong SAR Delegation and the Macau SAR Delegation jointly hosted a networking dinner for the China Delegation on 9 March 2015. Apart from the members of the China Delegation, Ambassador WANG Min, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United

Nations, and three other representatives from the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations also joined the dinner. Participants exchanged ideas on various issues of concern to women in China, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Advice sought

10. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Women's Commission Secretariat
May 2015

59th Session of UNCSW
Round table with ministerial participation on
National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for
action and accountability, catalysts for change
11 March 2015
Speaking Points for DS(W)1

Chair, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates:

- Thank you. I am honored to have this opportunity to speak on the mechanisms for gender equality in Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China.
- The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government spares no effort in promoting gender equality in Hong Kong. We have been faithfully implementing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action in accordance with the provisions of the Basic Law and other local legislation.

- In response to the recommendation of the CEDAW Committee, a high-level central mechanism, the Women's Commission, has been set up in Hong Kong since 2001 to take a strategic overview of women's issues, develop a long-term vision and strategy for the development and advancement of women, and advise the Government on the policies and initiatives that are of concern to women. In addition, gender focal points (GFPs) have been appointed across Government bureaux and departments. 85% of these GFPs are officers at the directorate level. GFPs have also been appointed in all our 18 District Councils.
- In Hong Kong, the freedom of speech, of the press, of religious belief, of choice of occupation, etc. is enjoyed by everyone regardless of gender. The rights of both genders' freedoms are well protected by the Basic Law and Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance.
- Both men and women are entitled to 12-year free education,

and we are now looking into the possibility of extending to 15-year free education. Women accounted for 54.1% of the university undergraduates in 2013. Both men and women also enjoy a comprehensive range of affordable, accessible and quality healthcare services. Equal employment opportunities and related employment protection for both genders are provided by various pieces of local legislation including the Employment Ordinance and the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. 44.6% of the working population in the third quarter of 2014 was women, with a growing number of women taking up professional and senior positions.

- 2015 marks the twentieth year since the adoption of Beijing Platform For Action. 2015 is also an important year for women's development in Hong Kong. In this January, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR has announced in his Policy Address two policy initiatives on women development as recommended by the Women's Commission.

- First, starting from April 1st, all bureaux and departments in the HKSARG will be required to apply gender mainstreaming to formulating major government policies, initiatives and legislation. Institutionalising gender mainstreaming can enhance our policy formulation process during which government officers will be conscious of assessing gender implications as part of their daily work. It also provides an enabling environment to ensure that women and men have equitable access to, and benefit from, society's resources and opportunities.
- Secondly, also starting from April 1st, we will raise the gender benchmark for appointing women to Government advisory and statutory bodies (by 5 percentage points) from 30% to 35%. Government advisory and statutory bodies are important entities which involve the participation of a wide cross-section of the community and relevant organisations in the policy-formulation and public service planning processes. The raise in the gender benchmark

will be beneficial to the well-being of women by enhancing their social participation and better reflect the perspectives and concerns of both genders.

- Promoting gender equality is an issue very close to our hearts. With society's concerted efforts, we will continue to help women realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life.
- Thank you.