

Members' Reflections

Abiding by Each Other

Three years ago, 22 committee members from different occupations, backgrounds and with a variety of experience came together to form the first Women's Commission. There have been times of intense debate and discussion over issues but, today, Members are still moving in a common direction. For we all share the same dream – to advance the well-being and interests of women, and to build a society in which men and women can be equals and live harmoniously with each other. Our three-year term passed quickly but Members, who have given their utmost to this mission, have also been growing every day, together with the women of Hong Kong.

Below, Members give their thoughts, impressions and hopes for advancing the well-being of women in Hong Kong.

Non-Official Members

Ms Cecilia CHEN, MH, JP (Chairperson, The Legal Education Trust Fund)

The Commission is a serious, dedicated and hard-working group

At the start it was difficult because so many women's issues seemed to require attention. All Members were familiar with women's problems but because they represented different sectors with different experience and interests, they also had different priorities.

Through visiting women's groups and community organisations, several brainstorming sessions, and a close working relationship between Members and the Secretariat, we identified three priority areas of work. The Commission is a serious, dedicated and hard-working group. Out of so many meetings, there was not one relaxed social gathering. Members spent their time on policy discussions, group meetings and reading papers. They also joined the Secretariat in organising and participating in many events.

It has been a rich and rewarding three years and I have enjoyed working with fellow Members.

Echoes

Frank debates –

stimulate the heart

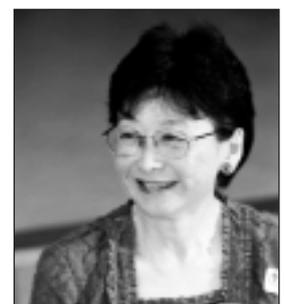
Site visits –

strengthen beliefs

From thinking to
action

From within to
without

Deep impressions
were left on lives



Mr Wellington CHENG (Executive Director of Supercrest Ltd and Topway Engineering (HK) Ltd)

Foster communication, encouragement and acceptance in a spirit of unity to promote women's well-being



In the past three years, the Commission has done a lot of good for women in Hong Kong but many challenges still await. As new immigrant women in their 30s and 40s are on the rise in Hong Kong and the average life expectancy of women is longer than men, in 20 to 30 years there will be a large number of women in their 60s and 70s. The Government has to be ready to respond to this increase.

Spouse abuse is another issue. Most victims are women who suffer physical trauma and immense psychological pressure and pain in silence. In fact, there are more than 300 women's organisations and associations in Hong Kong, each with their own missions and goals. I hope the Commission, government departments and women's organisations can foster communication, support and acceptance, and promote women's well-being in a spirit of unity. I also hope women's organisations can make good use of the resources available and utilise the Commission's new web page functions to share information and express their views.

Humans are the wisest and most capable of all living beings. Men and women should care for each other and live in respect and equality so that together they can work for a better world.

Ms Ophelia CHEUNG, JP (Global Vice-President, International Women's Forum and community service volunteer)

The Commission has drawn attention to women's issues



The establishment of the Commission as a central mechanism within the Government was a landmark in the social development of Hong Kong. To me, it was a challenge to be appointed a Member of this new and much-awaited organisation in which such high hopes were placed.

Much time was spent during the early months on workshops, forums, brain-storming and "soul-searching" in an effort to make work plans and set priorities for the first three-year term. This was worthwhile as not only did we achieve these objectives but in the process Members got to know more about one another, which was useful when working so closely together. Under the inspiring leadership of our Chairperson and with the support of the Secretariat, Members worked very hard on the mission set out for the Commission.

To date, the Commission has drawn attention to women's issues and launched many projects of benefit to women. There is still a lot to be done and the task that lies ahead for the Commission is colossal. But I firmly believe a good foundation has been laid and the Commission is going in the right direction.

Professor Fanny CHEUNG, JP (Chairperson of the Department of Psychology and Director of the Gender Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

A milestone in women's development in Hong Kong

The establishment of the Commission in 2001 was a milestone in women's development in Hong Kong. It gives me a sense of accomplishment to be closely associated with the movement that made it a reality. Throughout my involvement in the War-on-Rape campaign, the Women's Centre, the campaign for CEDAW and setting up a Women's Commission, I firmly believed in a central mechanism to promote women's status and development. During my time as the first Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission, I became more convinced of the need for a government structure that could address the fundamental barriers to women's development beyond the framework of unlawful discrimination.

Starting an organisation like the Commission is challenging. Given the enthusiasm and dedication of Members, we have explored many areas of need and embarked on meaningful projects in a short time. As a result, I look forward to the strategic development of policies for Hong Kong women in the 21st century.



Dr Susan FAN (Executive Director, The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong)

A deep admiration for the strength and dedication that women devote to those they serve

Being a Member of the Commission has been both an inspiring and a humbling experience.

Inspiring because through working with other women and members of the community, I have gained a broader understanding of the wide range of issues that impact on women's lives, and a deep admiration for the strength and dedication that women devote to those they serve.

Humbling in the realisation that there is still so much to be done and that we need to support one another in working towards common goals.



Ms IP Shun-hing (Tuen Mun District Council Member)

Brightening the history of the local women's movement



From 1987 onwards, New Territories women's organisations and I urged the Government to establish a Women's Commission. Finally, in 2001, the Government announced the setting up of the Commission to promote women's interests in Hong Kong. I was honoured to be appointed one of its Members. I have been working on behalf of grassroots women for more than 20 years and the Commission has been an opportunity to contribute further.

In the past three years, ex-officio and non-official Members have made great efforts to carry out the Commission's work. By visiting local women's groups and service organisations, and learning more about women's situation, we worked out directions, objectives, priorities and concrete plans. Though there is room for improvement, it has been a good start, brightening the history of the local women's movement.

I hope Members will work more closely with women's organisations for a better tomorrow for women in Hong Kong.

Ms Sophia KAO, JP (Community service volunteer, Retired Human Resources Director of Airport Authority)

Empowerment of women should not only be a priority of the Women's Commission, it should be considered an important policy in the social development of Hong Kong



Women are a massive force in the push for social development. They have great influence through nurturing and educating the next generation and in their ability to build solidarity and cohesion in the family and community. Thus, empowerment of women should not only be a priority of the Commission, it should be considered an important policy in the social development of Hong Kong.

In the past three years, the Empowerment Task Force worked hard on both individual and collective levels of empowerment. The most rewarding results was the implementation of Capacity Building Mileage Programme. The origin, incubation and development of this programme progressed in response to hopes for self-enhancement expressed by various women in different settings. I hope that you will continue to offer your active participation and support, and also suggest recommendations for its improvement.

As a Member of the first Commission, I have had the opportunity to work with a group of women and men from different backgrounds, who worked together with zeal as we shared the same beliefs. I also had the chance to exchange views and collaborate with many women's groups and individuals involved with women's concerns. It has been an exciting and unforgettable experience. I hope that those tasks begun and not yet completed in the term of the first Commission might be implemented and continued in the future to promote women's well-being. Examples of such tasks are the compilation of a women services directory and the project to review legislation on women's rights.

Dr Joseph KWOK, JP (Associate Professor, Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong)

The cornerstone of an egalitarian and harmonious society

In the past three years, I have had the opportunity to work with Members of the Commission who come from very different backgrounds but share the same goals, passion and enthusiasm. It has been a most enriching experience. My own contributions seem minuscule in comparison.

Members have been careful to preserve unity on the main themes and willing to accommodate on minor points when considering issues. They have made continuous and painstaking efforts to promote women's well-being and interests and worked sincerely to secure the co-operation of, and develop partnerships with, government agencies and community organisations.

The Commission has indeed delivered on its early promise by laying down a solid foundation for an egalitarian and harmonious society. An encouraging situation to share with you all!



Mrs Peggy LAM, GBS, OBE, JP (Chairman, Hong Kong Federation of Women)

We should step up our efforts to liaise with women from all walks of life and encourage women to broaden their perspectives, to empower themselves and to enable the public to affirm their contributions to the family and society



After Hong Kong's return to China, the Honourable Tung Chee-hwa, Chief Executive of HKSAR, read the opinion paper presented by Hong Kong Federation of Women. He acknowledged women's contributions to society in his 1997 Policy Address, and after persistent and energetic public requests and lobbying by women's groups, the Women's Commission was finally set up in 2001.

In the past three years, the Commission has engaged in an active opinion-gathering to collect views on directions and strategies of endeavour, and we are now clearer with regard to ways and means of work. We spent much efforts researching women's public policy, and in long-term planning for the promotion of women's well-being. We also set up three Task Forces to promote gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women and public education.

Personally, I think that the Commission should step up efforts to liaise with women from all walks of life, review policy related to women's well-being and interests, encourage women to broaden their participation in political, social and economic domains, and develop women's potentials, enhance their capacities and improve their quality of life. We should do more to build solidarity with women from different circles. We should also do more to encourage women to broaden their perspectives and empower themselves so that the public can acknowledge their contributions to family and society, and the work of the Commission would be recognised by all sectors of the community.

Mr Maurice LEE (Partner of Robertsons, Solicitors)

Diamond cut diamond



It has been a rare and wonderful experience to work in a group in which I, as a member of the male minority, was surrounded by competent women leaders from our community. My lady colleagues were wise, charming, creative and determined to achieve. Our Chairperson was, in particular, a special leader: a candle that lights up others. She was visionary, fearless, outspoken and resourceful and she could bite if she thought you were not doing well.

The Commission is a new body with the formidable task of taking care of half of the population in Hong Kong. Possibilities are many but that also makes focus and depth very difficult. The Commission, however, does not tolerate clichés and grumbles. I was relieved that after many months of “soul-searching” and scratching of brains, we concluded that “capacity building” was the way to go ahead.

During this critical time in Hong Kong, I am dismayed that many people are still indifferent and naive enough to think that their problems are caused by others. Government, family, school, friends and the social environment all have to change for them and yet they themselves are not obliged to change for the better. She that is ill to herself will be good to nobody. I truly believe that intellectual, spiritual and emotional capacity building is the panacea. I look forward to witnessing a better you, me and Commission in the years to come.

Professor Judith MACKAY (Doctor and Director, Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control)

I have drawn great strength and encouragement from the Women’s Commission and from other like-minded people

Soon after I arrived in Hong Kong in the 1960s, I was actively engaged in campaigning for equal pay and terms of service, separate taxation for married women, a refuge for battered women, maternity leave, better treatment for victims of rape, an end to discriminatory laws and sexist portrayal in the media, the collection of sex-disaggregated data, improvement in women’s health (the topic that led me into tobacco control), and general awareness of gender issues. It is disappointing that many of these issues – and new ones – are still with us 40 years on.

But today the task is less controversial, and in the intervening years there has been much positive action by government, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and society in general on many gender issues. I have drawn great strength and encouragement from the Commission and from other like-minded people – men and women. Being primarily involved with gender mainstreaming on the Commission has provided a unique opportunity to establish a template for government to ensure that women’s perspective and needs are considered for legislation, policy and programmes.



AN ODE TO THE WOMEN'S COMMISSION
On Its First Birthday
Professor Judith MACKAY
January 2002

*On the 19th January Two Thousand and One
To right existing gender wrong
The Year of the Dragon heralded in
The Women's Commission of Hong Kong*

*With women drawn from all Hong Kong
And some male colleagues too
Our job is to advise the government...
And society, on just what to do*

*"To enable women in Hong Kong"
Our mission for all – whether single or wife
"To fully realize their due status, rights,
And opportunities in all aspects of life"*

*Task forces followed, in total three
Gender mainstreaming and education are two
Empowerment of women is the third
There are countless things to do!*

*We've attended six main meetings
But that is just the core
Counting all the sub-committees
There've been many, many more*

*Our shelves are packed with papers
And our emails full of the same
The work increases more and more
And never seems to wane.*

AN ODE TO WOMEN'S DAY 2003
Professor Judith MACKAY
8 March 2003

*The United Nations decided
To right existing gender wrong
With an International Women's Day
Long celebrated in Hong Kong*

*From the early 1980s
Women gathered on the day
To campaign for their equal rights
And, no less, equal pay*

*Back in the nineteenth century
There were quite simply no
Female judges, lawyers, doctors
Or women members of Legco*

*Our Chairperson rallies us around
Making sure that nothing's missed
And the Secretariat rules us firmly
With a velvet iron fist*

*We've been bussed to many site visits
In merry yet serious bands
We've met with delegations
And visited foreign lands*

*Let's have some stats on women
And see them sit on government boards
Let's have new laws on stalking
And help for new arrival hoards*

*We must address domestic violence
And single parents too
Sex workers, and community needs
A never-ending list to do*

*And as we look to the future
How do we judge what our success will be?
That we are renamed 'The Gender Commission'
In ten more years and three.*

*Ladies even had their feet bound
And it was not until
Well into the twentieth century
Mui tsais were reduced to nil*

*A pioneer in 1951
The first policewoman was recruited
And slowly but surely in the Force
Women were saluted*

*In 86 the very first
District Judge was Helen Lo
Showing appointing senior women
Was Hong Kong's way to go*

*We had pioneers like Ellen Li
Anson Chan and Anna Wu
Maria Tam on separate taxation
And our own dear Elsie Tu*

*Lydia, Rosanna, Selina all
Proved their worth once selected
Emily Lau, a first in 91
To Legco was elected*

*Christine Loh was another
To focus on vital issues
And show us women can be strong
Not just weep and reach for tissues!*

*Thus women entered politics
And professions such as law
Doctors, judges, housewives
They opened many a door*

*Countless things were rectified
And marriage laws improved
Equal pay came to government
And forward regulations moved*

*Great strides were made in better health
Even an Olympic gold
Women showed it could be done
Whether they were young or old*

*In 77 the War on Rape
Brought the issue to the fore
And Harmony House from 85
Showed battered women a safe door*

*Universal schooling for all girls
Separate tax for those married
Maternity leave and better health
Yet women still feel harried*

*The cigarette companies
Worldwide, but specially Asian
Targetted Hong Kong's young women
With messages of emancipation*

*Other ads still discriminate
And make women look just like
Sex objects, even empty heads
With no hint of our might*

*Our progress over decades
Is there for all to see
But there's still so far to go
For women's equality*

*Let's have some stats on women
See them sit on government boards
Let's have new laws on stalking
And help for new arrival hoards*

*We must address domestic violence
And single parents too
Sex workers, and community needs
A never-ending list to do*

*We need the Women's Commission
And the strength of the EOC
We need to report to CEDAW
So all the world can see*

*We need the NGO community
Like the International Women's Forum
And academia, to campaign
Sometimes loud; at times, decorum*

*Hong Kong has done not badly
Compared with other states
Especially those in Asia
Where women's issues waits*

*So let us toast together
The women of Hong Kong
And here's to equal opportunities
And may it not take long*

*Brigitta Blaha-Silva
Is one of the very few
Female consuls in Hong Kong
She gives women their just due*

*We thank you for your thoughtfulness
And may this never cease
And to your future's many years
Of health, and joy and peace.*

Ms Diane WILCOXSON (Senior Partner, Strategic Planning with Corporations and Organisations, Hong Kong, Asia, Europe)

Everyone seems to have done the best possible to make a difference in the few years we have been established



The opportunity to serve on the Women's Commission has been, for me, a special and educational challenge. It has allowed me to learn in some detail about situations that women and families in Hong Kong face daily. This insight has developed from first-hand visits to groups and individuals all over the city, in forums and seminars, from experts and through reports by those who work in many areas of the community and Government.

People from a surprisingly wide variety of backgrounds and sensibilities serve on the Commission. I have developed a deep respect for what each one has contributed. Everyone seems to have done the best possible to make a difference in the few years we have been established. To best accomplish the work it is tasked with, the Commission has worked effectively with a diversity of group and individual approaches. I anticipate that the Commission will use ever-wider collaboration in years to come as it refines this aspect of its work locally, regionally and internationally.

Serving on the Commission has been a way to contribute some of what I know from my work within business, communities and women's issues. It is these opportunities to both serve and to learn for which I am, and will long be, grateful. Surely, the Commission in years ahead will generate more activity and progress on many fronts, which will, hopefully, build on the good intentions and foundations established by this first group of appointees.

Ms Margaret WONG (Executive Director, Harmony House Limited)

The Commission has been nurtured by support from a variety of sectors in society, all committed to making sure it has the right ground to grow



The setting up of the Women's Commission three years ago reminds me of a poster depicting a large, green field in the midst of which a yellow seedling nudged its way out of the earth. The plant had unfolded its first small leaves, embraced the sunlight and its presence had started to enhance the world around it.

In the past few years, there have been strong winds, stormy weather and frustrations as well as happy, satisfying moments but the Commission, like that seedling, is ready to weather all obstacles in order to achieve its mission. To foster its aim to promote women's development, the Commission has put down three major root systems: gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women and public education. It has also been nurtured by support from a variety of sectors in society, all committed to making sure that it has the right ground to grow and, one day, bring about recognition of the due rights of all women in the community.

The Commission has put forth initial shoots and, though still young, is clearly demonstrating the value of equality, respect and compassion. It will certainly continue to flourish, and as it does so boost women's concerns to new levels of visibility.

Miss Annie WU, SBS, JP (Managing Director, Hong Kong Beijing Air Catering Ltd)

Constantly improving ourselves to face challenges and live a full life

I have been involved in promoting youth education in Hong Kong and children's education in Mainland China for a long time. They are the future pillars of society. Similarly, I have been involved in promoting the well-being of women in Hong Kong. I deeply believe that by demolishing gender stereotypes and helping women build up their capacities, women from different sectors of society (and especially the younger generation), will be enabled to realise their potential and shoulder "half the sky" with the men of Hong Kong.

We live in an era of advanced information technology and a world that is increasingly globalised. Women need to increase their capacities be they far-reaching women entrepreneurs, working in society or young women in school, or one of the many talented homemakers. We need to develop our capacities, to be constantly improving ourselves, to face challenges and to live a full life.

I was privileged to be appointed to the Commission and to contribute to the promotion of women's rights and well-being in Hong Kong. I hope others value the opportunity and set up closer links with overseas women's organisations so we can work for the well-being of women unconstrained by boundaries.



**Mr YEUNG Ka-sing, JP (Head – Corporate Human Resources,
The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited)**

A rewarding and fulfilling mission



The Commission aims to promote women’s rights in the community. It is truly a rewarding and fulfilling mission. I would like to take this opportunity to say what an honour and privilege it has been to serve on the Commission.

I am glad to see that over the past years, our efforts have gradually borne fruit. Promotion of women’s rights is beginning to make headway. The Commission could not have achieved this and done the many demanding jobs before it without the efforts of different community organisations seeking to create a more caring community. This unswerving support has been the driving force for improvements within the Commission.

The increasing awareness of women’s rights will undoubtedly assist the Commission in extending its reach and developing its programmes. I am confident that the Commission will further promote women’s rights in all walks of life in Hong Kong in the coming years. In so doing, together we can build a better future and a more harmonious society for Hong Kong!

**Dr Agnes YEUNG LAW (Professor, Department of Social Work,
Zhongshan University, Guangzhou, Mainland China)**

*Accommodate multifaceted gender perspectives in determining criteria
for reviewing the polices and quality of services*



The biggest challenge facing modern women is how to manage confusing social messages and conflicting social expectations. Mainstream society has always lauded equality between men and women. But women now have to be breadwinners and keep up traditional virtues so they live under immense pressure.

Women need to understand their own needs, interests and potential to overcome all these challenges. They need to state their opinions and make their own way in life. Mainstream society, especially decision-makers, also need to reflect on how to eliminate prejudice against women and how to enable them to develop their potential.

In the past three years, I have had contact with women from many types of social backgrounds. This enabled me to systematically integrate my past experience with women's issues. Through site visits, I got to know members of many different women's groups. Grassroots women's organisations have immense potential for strengthening social cohesion. I hope that in the days ahead, the Commission can reduce meetings and paper work and increase their contact with women from different social strata to better understand their needs. I also hope the Commission can strengthen its communication and co-operation with women's organisations so government and private organisations can accommodate multifaceted gender perspectives in determining criteria for reviewing polices and quality of services.

Ms Cecilia YOUNG (Executive Director, Sze Kuen Investments Ltd)

A significant contribution to the local women's movement

The commitment in the Commission's first year to make gender mainstreaming one of the objectives was a huge step forward. Implementing the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist has made me realise the complexity of dealing with the huge government structure. Our success in getting "Gender Focal Point" to be designated within government departments and bureaux is a significant contribution to the local women's movement.

The struggle to be accountable to civil society – to women we serve in the case of Commission – is never easy. Strategic moves have to be made from within and outside the government mechanism and honest consultation undertaken before sustainable changes can occur.

Participating in the Commission for the past three years has fostered better understanding and network. To my colleagues and especially the Secretariat, a sincere note of thanks.



Ex-officio Members

Secretary for Education and Manpower or representative Professor the Honourable Arthur LI, GBS, JP (Secretary for Education and Manpower)

The Commission had made progressive achievements



I am very pleased to extend my congratulations to the Women's Commission on the successful completion of its first term.

The Commission was established to advise Government on the direction of policy on women issues. In addition, it has been tasked with identifying women's needs and addressing matters of concern to women. The Commission has made progressive achievements in its first term to these ends. Apart from sound advice to Government, the Commission promoted public education on gender issues through a series of well-received activities which had enhanced public awareness and knowledge. It also organised capacity building programme and made invaluable contribution towards the promotion of the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. These are important to a society which emphasizes nurturing all individual potentials to the full, and we owe much to the visionary leadership of Chairperson of the Commission and concerted efforts of Members.

I wish the Commission continued success in the coming new term.

Secretary for Home Affairs or representative

Dr the Honourable Patrick HO, JP (Secretary for Home Affairs)

Developed a clear vision and a long-term strategy



The establishment of the Women's Commission in 2001 was a milestone in the development of equal rights for women and men and the advancement of human rights for all. As the Principal Official responsible for human rights, one of my duties is to promote recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings. Both women and men are entitled to human rights without distinction.

In Hong Kong, women often play a dual role of income-gainer and home-maker, and the pressures on them can be enormous. I support the work of the Women's Commission in identifying women's needs and addressing the related issues and problems.

The law and the Judiciary in Hong Kong provide effective means of dealing with individual cases of abuse of women. However, there are still instances of prejudice and discrimination against women. We must work together to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for both women and men.

Since its establishment, the Women's Commission has developed a clear vision and a long-term strategy for the development and advancement of women in Hong Kong. The Commission's work deserves our fullest support and I wish the Commission every success in its future endeavours.

Director of Social Welfare or representative

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP (then Director of Social Welfare)

(Mr Paul TANG, JP has been Director of Social Welfare since

November 2003)

Join hands in promoting the well being and interests of women

Having served in the Women's Commission as an ex-officio member since its set up in January 2001, I have witnessed the many areas of work being carried out by the Commission to promote public education and raise awareness within the local community on gender-related matters.

I have participated in very serious and sometimes passionate discussions in Commission meetings on issues relating to the empowerment of women. I am particularly indebted to the Chairperson and Members of the Commission for the advice and support they have given to the Social Welfare Department in taking forward various initiatives to tackle family problems, including the pilot Integrated Family Service Centres and the Ending Exclusion Project for single parent CSSA recipients.

Looking ahead, we will continue to join hands in promoting the well-being and interests of women and in building a more caring community.



Vice-Chairperson

Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food or representative

Dr the Honourable YEOH Eng-kiong, JP (Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food)

I am most impressed by the enthusiasm, dedication and zeal put in by Members



In the first three years, the Commission has made significant progress in its primary goal of promoting the development and advancement of women. Members have laid down after careful and detailed deliberation, the Commission's mission, which is "to enable women to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life". I fully identify with and endorse the mission and the Government will do its utmost to support the Commission in creating an environment which will facilitate women to develop their potential and participate in society. This includes gender mainstreaming, or incorporating women's needs and perspectives in policy making, and addressing some deep-seated gender stereotyping notions in society about the roles, images and abilities of the two sexes.

The Commission has successfully incubated a new learning platform, the Capacity Building Mileage Programme, to bring about new learning opportunities and dimensions for women. The Commission is also rolling out mechanisms for collaborating with various sectors of the community to achieve synergy in its work.

I am most impressed by the enthusiasm, dedication and zeal put in by Members of the Women's Commission and the vast amount of work they have done in the first three years of the Commission's life. The Commission is certainly one of the most active and diligent advisory bodies the Government has ever appointed. I am deeply grateful for the insightful advice and innovative suggestions given by Commission members across a wide range of issues.

I look forward to working with the Commission in further promoting the well-being and interests of women and the community as a whole.

Chairperson

The Honourable Mrs Sophie LEUNG, SBS, JP (Deputy, 10th National People's Congress, Mainland China)

We have striven to find the means to promote the interests and welfare of women in a sincere, truthful way. Our task has been to establish a solid foundation while meeting the challenges and overcoming the obstacles facing our nascent organisation

As the Women's Commission's first chairperson, I have had to move step by step in the past three years. I was aware that women from different social backgrounds had a range of experiences, difficulties and needs. Members of the Commission, while all keen to advance women's welfare, also had their own varied views on gender issues. How were we to consider all these disparate women's voices? How could Commission members be brought to consensus?

The mode of action I decided on was to work from the heart – to listen sensitively and to engage in genuine dialogue. Thus, along with formal Commission meetings, members held several reflective sessions lasting deep into the night. These were valuable, soul-searching occasions. Clashes of opinion were bravely debated using reasoned argument and frank exchange. Such in-depth discussions led to friendship and a high degree of mutual trust as we explored viewpoints and directions, settled differences and sought common ground in order to forge a way to realise our shared ideals.

Interaction with women in the community also gave members great awareness and inspiration. In my term of office, we were active in visiting groups and organisations and made contact with women in a variety of circumstances. Their experiences, wisdom and fortitude often provided new views on gender issues to consider.

During these pioneering days at the Commission, we have striven to find the means to promote the interests and welfare of women in a sincere, truthful way. Our task has been to establish a solid foundation while meeting the challenges and overcoming the obstacles facing our nascent organisation. I hope that in the coming days, the Women's Commission will take our present work to greater depth and breadth and that more people will join us in building a brave, new world of gender equality and harmony that enriches the lives of us all.

