

Statement**By****Mrs. Kanda Vajrabhaya****To the East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting****June 30 – 1 July, 2006****Tokyo, Japan****Honorable Minister Kuniko INOGOCHI,****Distinguished delegates,****Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We all agree that gender mainstreaming is a vital mechanism to deliver gender responsive development and gender equality. In Thailand, the national women machinery, the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, has proposed policies and guidelines on developing women's potentiality, promotion of gender equality, protection of women's rights and strengthening of family institution as well as supporting nationwide networks of women and families in implementing the Office's policies and guidelines through partnership with local administrative organizations and civil society organizations.

To enhance the participation of women in development, and to ensure equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels, Thailand's national machinery undertakes various efforts to encourage cooperation and contribution from all sectors: public, private, academic, and civil society.

During the past three years, Thai government has considered various amendments to national laws that impede women's advancement, such as the Name Act that enable a wife to use either her own family name or her husband's after marriage and the Civil and Commercial Code regarding engagement and divorce.

In addition, new legal instruments have been prepared to further enhance women's development as well as to create the environment for promotion of gender equality. For example the draft *Prevention and Resolution of Domestic Violence Bill*, is under the State Council's consideration, where by the draft "Increasing opportunity and Equality for Women Bill" is in the early stage of public hearing.

Regarding Education, Thailand has accomplished in eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary levels of education, but the government has proceeded even further by setting target to reduce gender disparities in field of study in tertiary education; empowering women over 40 years of age with non-formal, life long education and independent studies; developing textbooks with contents and illustrations that promote knowledge of women's rights, help correct gender bias and stereotyped images of women.

Thailand has also prepared to create an enabling environment for gender equality in longer term through education and research. Women studies, Women's rights and gender issue are topics being integrated in the curriculum in local universities. Some universities have already offered courses on Women Studies at graduate level. It is expected that education will help generate better understanding on gender issues.

To ensure that poor people can have equal access to credit and social services between female-headed and male-headed households. The government has installed temporary measures to focus more on female-headed households where social and financial assistances are rendered.

Efforts have been made to ensure that women and men equally benefit from the government's economic policies and programs, such as the *Village and Urban Community Fund*, whose regulation stipulates a gender-balanced committee members, and the *One-Tambon-One-Product Project*, which promotes utilization of local wisdom and networking of women in the communities.

On women's participation in decision-making processes, Thailand has set the target of *doubling* proportion of women in 2000 in the parliament, Tambon Administrative Organization and executive positions in the civil service by the end 2006. We have already met the target in the case of senators and civil service executive positions and will have to continue working on others. Training courses have been organized by the national women machinery in conjunction with NGOs to prepare women for electoral candidacy.

The institutional mechanisms for women development, namely the *Chief Gender Equality Officers and Gender Focal Points*, have been established as a means to promote gender mainstreaming in policies and programs of every ministry and department, while the networks of women leaders in local administration and communities serve as the provincial machinery. Both of these mechanisms should help to ensure greater role and participation of women in decision-making processes.

At present, there are 129 CGEOs and GFPs of governmental agencies. 107 of these agencies have already formulated Master Plans on Gender Equality Promotion while the rest are conducting their action plans and preparing their progress reports.

While Thailand is moving quite actively in this area, there are still problems waiting to be solved. The relatively low level of public understanding of gender issues, together with persistent traditional beliefs lead to the weakening of law enforcement and indifferences from many organizations. It is the mandate for Thailand to overcome those obstacles by continuing working with partners in all sectors both within the country and within the region, finding best practices from neighboring countries and exchanging ideas and information with them regularly. This forum is offering another possibility of such working relationship to take place and to sustain for the maximum benefit of gender equality status of Thailand and all member countries.

Thank you for your kind attention.
