

Progresses & Challenges of Gender Mainstreaming in China

----- Statement by H.E. Mme. Zhao Shaohua
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Under the State Council of the People's Republic of China
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Her Excellency Minister Inoguchi,
Dear Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Today, ministers from East Asian countries and senior representatives from the United Nations are gathered at Tokyo for this important high-level meeting, exploring and discussing gender equality issues. That is of great significance. For many years, China has been working with East Asian countries to advance the cause of gender equality, as not only are there many experiences and practices we could share with each other, there are also many challenges and problems we should face up to tackle with. This meeting will be another starting point for us to keep on collaborating to move ahead. Next, please allow me to brief about China's achievement made and challenges ahead in gender mainstreaming.

The Chinese government has been endeavoring to build up and upgrade the legal system, the national machinery and the working mechanism of gender mainstreaming, which has laid down more favorable conditions for Chinese women's development.

First, a legal system has taken its shape with the *Constitution* as the foundation, the *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women* as the main body and other relevant laws and regulations on women's rights and interests as important complements. Since 2000 in particular, laws and regulations in terms of women's health, education, employment, family and marriage etc. have been formulated or revised, such as the *Marriage Law*, *Law on Population and Family Planning*, *Rural Land Contracting Law* and the *Implementation Act on Maternal and Infant Healthcare*. The *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women*, newly revised on Dec. 1 last year has the national policy of gender equality included in its general provisions,

recognizes the new key issues in the socialist market economy, further perfects stipulations on women's political, cultural, educational, welfare, property, personal and marital rights, highlights relevant entities' legal responsibility, and strengthens women's entitlement to safeguard their rights and interests by law.

The national machinery on gender mainstreaming is the ministerial coordinating organ, the National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council, with Vice-Premier Wu Yi as the chair, encompassing 27 ministries such as Education, Justice and Labor and Social Security as well as 5 NGOs. Its major function is to coordinate and supervise related departments to promote gender equality and better safeguard women and children's rights and interests, in the process of implementing the national programs for the development of women and children, the Beijing Platform for Action and Outcome Documents of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. Major objectives of the programs have been allocated to relevant departments and NGOs to take concrete actions. Governments at 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) and 90% of the cities and counties have established local committees, constructing a four-level organizational system. Also systems of supervision, publicity, training and pilot project have been set up.

With joint efforts of the government and civil society, the environment of Chinese women's development has been further prioritized. The following data will help demonstrate: 1) Women's employment rate increased. By 2004, women accounted for 44.8% of the total workforce, with 337 million employed; 2) women's education level improved. By the end of 2003, the enrollment rate of girl student is 98.61%, with a gap of 0.08% between boys and girls, and the rates for girl student in junior high school and college/ universities are 45.08% and 44.52% respectively; 3) women's health condition further improved. The average life expectancy of women is 75.3 in 2002, 4.6 years longer than that of men. The maternal mortality rate in 2002 is 43.2 per hundred thousand, decreased by 9.8 per hundred thousand than the figure in 2000.

What is also worth mentioning is in the 11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, for the first time "full implementation of the gender equality policy and women development program" is included in its general goals as important parts for building a harmonious society. The incorporation of gender perspective into the country's social development plan represents the government's will and determination of carrying out a human-oriented policy with a scientific world outlook for all-round, coordinated and sustainable development, by following the world trend, fulfilling its commitments and providing policy and mechanism guarantees for gender equality.

Though much progress has been made, it is realized that rapid economic development doesn't lead to gender equality on its own. With one fifth of the

world's women in China, in face of the country's uneven regional development and the inconsistency between its social economic development and gender equality cause, it's an uphill struggle to realize gender equality. More efforts need to be taken to tackle with the following problems. 1) To strengthen poverty alleviation work through protecting rural women's rights to contracted land leasing and factory women workers' rights to labor protection, continuing to eliminate sex discrimination in employment and reemployment. 2) To enhance women's participation and management level in political decision-making, especially expand the scope of democratic management and supervision at grassroots level. 3) To promote women's education level, reducing the dropout rate in western China and helping migrant children receive standard education, in case of emergence of new illiterates. 4) To improve women's health condition, especially those from rural area and migrant people. 5) To ensure the full enjoyment of women's rights in family and marriage life. In addition, prevention of HIV/AIDS, elimination of domestic violence, and combating trafficking in women and children are also urgent tasks to be dealt with in the future.

In the end, I would like to once again express our sincere thanks to Minister Inoguchi, and thank the Japanese government for every effort made for the convention of this meeting. China would like to keep on conducting regional and international cooperation with East Asian countries and the world at large on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit to build a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious world.

Thank you.