

香 港



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THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

政治與公共行政學系

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

May 17, 2002

Sub-committee to Study the Proposed
Accountability System for Principal Officials
And Related Issues
Hong Kong Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Honourable Members of the Sub-Committee,

Whither the Women's Commission under the Accountability System?

In the one month since the announcement of the Accountability System for Principal Officials, discussion on the future location of the Women's Commission has been conspicuous by its absence. I am writing to raise some of my concerns with regard to the impact the new system might have on the Women's Commission, and perhaps put forward my own suggestion.

1. The Women's Commission is currently placed under the Health and Welfare Bureau. This location is not ideal as (i) women's issues are not only health and welfare issues, and locating it as such is misleading to the public; and (ii) to address women's issues properly would require concerted efforts from all bureaux. Much effort has to be made in policy co-ordination.
2. In the proposed new accountability system, the Health and Welfare Bureau will be enlarged to form the Environmental, Health and Welfare Bureau. One wonders whether the portfolio of the Director of this bureau would include women's affairs. (i) If that is the case, it is possible that women's issues might not loom large under this "super" bureau. (ii) If that is not the case, then I wonder which bureau women's affairs would come under.
3. In my view, placement of the Women's Commission under any one bureau is not a good idea. (i) Women's issues cannot be conceptualized in isolation, but are part and parcel of issues such as poverty, unemployment, economy, ageing, law and order, health, environment, housing, you name it. No single Director of Bureau should shoulder the responsibility for women's affairs, and doing so would only go against government's efforts to mainstream gender in its policymaking. (ii) The future relationship among bureaux might be one of competition for resources and credit, whole-hearted co-operation may not be easy to achieve.

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4. My suggestion, if I may, is to locate the Women's Commission under the portfolio of the Chief Secretary. It would have at least the following advantages:

- (i) The Chief Secretary is better positioned than any single bureau to perform the role of policy co-ordination.
- (ii) The HKSAR Government would be better able to claim that it has set up a *central* machinery for the advancement of women, in order to satisfy the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) introduced to Hong Kong in October 1996, and the Beijing Platform for Action arising from the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). This would save the government from *further* embarrassment when it prepares its second submission to the UN CEDAW Committee next year.
- (iii) Such a move would have no resource implication, nor would it upset the structure of government, nor does it violate the Basic Law.
- (iv) In the eyes of the NGO community, it would be one step forward, albeit a small step, in reflecting the government's sincerity in addressing women's issues.

I would appreciate if the Sub-committee would seriously consider this rather neglected area, and help reflect my opinion to the relevant officials.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

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