

**Submission on the Second Report on the
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women to be considered by the
UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

In anticipation of the hearing to be conducted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) on the Second Report on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Islands District Council (IsDC) would like to give its views and comments on the content of the Second Report as follows:

Raising the Level of Hong Kong Women's Participation in the Decision Making Process:

As mentioned in the Initial Report on the HKSAR submitted to the CEDAW Committee in 1999, two of the three highest ranking officials in the civil service and nearly one-third of the Executive Council (ExCo) Members were women. However, the level of women's participation has been declining remarkably over the past two years. Currently, there are only two women among the 15 non-official ExCo Members. Likewise, only two of the 19 Principal Officials are women.

The IsDC notices that the HKSAR Government attaches much importance in increasing the proportion of women members in advisory and statutory bodies since 2003. It is worth noting that in early 2006, the average proportion of women members in these bodies is 25.6%. However, the overall distribution of women members is far from comprehensive. Up till now, there are still no women members in some DC advisory committees.

Women and Poverty:

Faced with the economic restructuring brought about by globalisation, the impoverishment of Hong Kong women with low skills and education attainments, who are mostly engaged in low-paid or part-time jobs, is aggravating. In fact, women account for over 70% of our working population

with a monthly income of less than \$5,000 and make up the majority of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients. On the other hand, housewives are not covered by the Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme and in recent years, the average life expectancy of women has reached 82 years. As a result, the problem of impoverished elderly women has become a matter of great concern.

Women and Health:

In view of the stressful urban life in Hong Kong, women's health is requiring more attention. Diseases such as breast cancer, cervical cancer and osteoporosis have become the most common causes of death for middle and old-aged women. However, women tend to neglect their own health, and this requires the HKSAR Government to play a more active role in arousing public awareness in this respect. A survey conducted early this year revealed that half of the female respondents did not receive regular health checks and more than half of them did not take out any medical insurance.

Recommendations:

In view of the unfavourable conditions for Hong Kong women's participation in the decision making process and the existing difficulties faced by them, we propose the following: -

1. To conduct a policy review on the proportion of women civil servants, especially Principal Officials, by all policy bureaux under the leadership of the Chief Secretary for Administration. In order to improve the conditions for women's participation in political affairs, attention should be paid to the distribution of women members in various advisory and statutory bodies, particularly the districts and organisations with a low level of women participation.
2. To provide continuing education and practical skill improvement courses in the form of informal education in order to help women equip themselves with necessary skills for re-entering the job market. This will also help them adapt to the economic restructuring and build their confidence against adversity.

3. To provide working women with support services, such as nursery, after-school care and elderly services, so that they need not worry about their families while they are at work.
4. To establish the “Women Health Day” in order to raise women’s health awareness and remind them to conduct regular health checks. The HKSAR Government should also introduce tax deduction for medical insurance contributions and strengthen healthcare services for women at the grassroots level and the disadvantaged groups.
5. Women groups in various districts have served the local communities over the years and well understand women’s circumstances and service needs. They endeavour to enhance women development and serve as an important driving force in building harmonious families and society. However, the leaders of these groups are volunteers. They are under tremendous pressure in securing talents and funding support for the operation of their groups and the delivery of effective services. In this connection, the HKSAR Government should explore ways to support these groups and enhance the capabilities of their leaders in order to enable them to increase the level of women’s participation in political affairs and lift women out of poverty.

Islands District Council
Contact Person: Ms CHAU Chuen-heung
2 June 2006