

## **Progress Report on Government's Efforts in Promoting Gender Equality**

At its meeting on 12 December 2007, the Legislative Council (LegCo) passed the motion moved by the Hon Audrey EU, as amended by the Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, urging the Government to actively promote gender equality. The wording of the motion passed is at Annex. This paper summarises the progress made by the Government in promoting gender equality for Members' reference.

### **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

2. The Government is always committed to promoting the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong to ensure that women can enjoy, as men, equal opportunities in different aspects including the political, economic and social arenas. Since the introduction of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of the United Nations (UN) into Hong Kong in 1996, the Government has adhered to and discharged its obligations under CEDAW to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong.

3. In August 2006, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women examined the second report submitted by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under CEDAW. The Committee recognised the efforts made by the HKSAR Government in promoting women's development in Hong Kong. In its concluding comments, the Committee expressed appreciation of the HKSAR delegation's comprehensive replies to the questions raised by members both before and during the hearing, and the frank and constructive dialogue that took place at the hearing. It also welcomed the active involvement of the civil society in Hong Kong, in particular women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in safeguarding the human rights of women.

4. The Committee has raised concerns and suggestions on a

number of issues contained in the Report. At the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Home Affairs on 9 February 2007, the Government briefed Members on its responses to the comments of the Committee. The Government will continue to enhance public awareness of CEDAW through different activities and channels, such as organising roving exhibitions, producing leaflets and announcements of public interest, as well as holding thematic seminars.

### **Women's Commission**

5. Besides, the Government established the Women's Commission (WoC) in 2001. The WoC is tasked to take a strategic overview on women issues and develop a long-term vision for the development and advancement of women. It also advises the Government on policies and programmes which are of concern to women. On the recommendation and with the assistance of the WoC, the Government has adopted a three-pronged strategy, namely the provision of an enabling environment, empowerment of women and public education in promoting the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong, and has maintained close liaison and collaboration with local women's groups. Good progress has been made so far.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

6. On the provision of an enabling environment, the Government has, on the advice and with the assistance of the WoC, implemented gender mainstreaming and applied the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist (the Checklist) to 24 policy or programme areas since 2002. The Checklist is an analytical tool developed by the WoC to assist government officers in incorporating, in a more systematic way, the gender perspectives in the policy formulation and programme development processes, so that women and men will have equitable access to, and benefit from, society's resources and opportunities. Apart from adopting the Checklist, officers of many bureaux and departments have also applied the gender mainstreaming concept in the course of their daily work, taking into account the needs and perspectives of both genders. The Government will continue to introduce the use of the Checklist and apply the gender mainstreaming concept to more policy areas on an

incremental basis.

### Capacity Building Mileage Programme

7. The Government has since March 2007 provided funding to support the continued operation of the Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP). The CBMP is a key initiative of the WoC in empowering women, and is implemented jointly with the Open University of Hong Kong, Commercial Radio and nearly 80 partnering women's groups and NGOs. It is a flexible learning programme tailored to the needs and interests of women, mainly delivered through radio broadcasting, supplemented by optional learning activities and face-to-face courses delivered by the NGOs. The courses include subjects such as managing interpersonal relationships, finance management, health and other practical issues in daily life.

8. Since its launch in March 2004, the CBMP has encouraged women of different backgrounds and educational levels to pursue life-long learning and self-development. Up to November 2007, the cumulative number of enrolments exceeded 20 000 and there is also a large network of audience reached through the radio programmes. Feedback from students is that they have benefited from the programme tremendously in terms of increased interests in learning and enhanced confidence and knowledge in resolving problems in daily life.

### Public Education

9. Over the past few years, the Government and the WoC have worked together to organise a number of public education programmes to reduce gender prejudice and stereotype and to raise public awareness of women-related issues. These included organizing open forums and seminars, producing three TV drama series "Women with Dreams" on capacity building and empowerment of women, producing announcements of public interest on television and radio and posters, as well as organising essay competitions, an Orientation Camp Game Design Contest, and celebration events for the International Women's Day on 8 March every year.

10. Last year, in connection with the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR, we supported the WoC in organising a series of activities, collectively named “Colourful Lives of Women” (華彩半邊天), to recognise the contribution of all sectors, in particular the women’s groups, in empowering women. These included the production of a series of short TV programmes to introduce the achievements and contributions of local women’s groups and NGOs in helping women to build up self-confidence and independence. In addition, the WoC also organised a large-scale exhibition on “Women of Hong Kong – A Century of Contribution and Development” on 30 November to 3 December 2007 to showcase the development of women in the areas of work, family, education and social participation in the past century and to pay tribute to women’s contribution to the society. The Government and the WoC will continue to work together to organise more public education and publicity programmes to reduce gender prejudice and stereotype.

### **Women’s Participation in Advisory and Statutory Bodies**

11. To enhance the participation of women in the advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs), the Government promulgated in January 2004 a working target of at least 25% for each gender (the 25% gender benchmark) for the purpose of appointments to ASBs. The 25% gender benchmark target was achieved in December 2005. As at October 2007, 26.5% of the appointed non-officials on ASBs (1 386 out of 5 230 post-holders) were women.

12. Since we have just achieved the 25% gender benchmark, we do not have any plan to raise it further at this stage. The appointing authorities would, as a matter of principle, make appointments to ASBs on the basis of the merit of the individual concerned, taking into account the candidate’s ability, expertise, experience, integrity and commitment to public service, with due regard to the functions and nature of business of the ASB concerned and any relevant statutory requirements. We shall consolidate our achievement and continue to encourage the appointing authorities to take proactive measures to identify and cultivate women who are willing and able to contribute to the work of ASBs.

## **Support for Grassroot Women**

13. Various government departments have provided women from the grassroots, including new arrivals and single mothers, with a wide range of support services, such as employment, training, family support, childcare, health and medical services.

### Employment

14. Through its network of 12 job centres, the Telephone Employment Service Centre and the Interactive Employment Service website, the Labour Department (LD) provides a comprehensive range of free employment assistance and counselling services for job-seekers (including women) looking for employment in the labour market. The LD also offers various employment programmes, including the Job Matching Programme, Employment Programme for the Middle-aged and Work Trial Scheme, to provide employment assistance for job-seekers with different needs.

### Training and Retraining

15. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) offers a comprehensive range of vocational education, industrial training and skills upgrading courses to school leavers and adult learners to prepare them for employment or to enhance their employability. In the 2006/07 academic year, the VTC provided about 160 000 training places, and around 40% of the students/trainees were female.

16. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) provides retraining courses and related services to employees under the “Employees Retraining Scheme” (ERS) to help them enhance their vocational skills or acquire new skills, so as to meet the demands of the market and employers. Since the inception of ERS, the ERB has provided retraining for over one million retrainees, of whom about 76% are women. The eligibility criteria of the ERS has been relaxed since 1 December 2007 to cover young people aged between 15 and 29 and those with education level at sub-degree or below.

## Skills Upgrading and Continuous Learning

17. Besides, the Government launched in 2001 the Skills Upgrading Scheme to enhance the skills of employed workers. The scheme has provided nearly 200 000 training places and about 65% of the trainees are female. In 2002, the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) was set up to provide subsidies to Hong Kong residents aged between 18 and 65 with a view to encouraging continuous learning. As at the end of November 2007, the CEF had received a total of over 410 000 applications, and nearly 60% of the applicants are female.

## Family Services

18. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides a continuum of preventive, supportive and therapeutic welfare services to people and families in need through its 61 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) across the territory. These services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry service, volunteer training, outreaching service, various groups and activities as well as intensive counselling and referral services. Social workers of the IFSCs and ISCs are also equipped with relevant experience and skills, and will assess and address the needs of single parents and new arrival families in a comprehensive manner and provide them with appropriate services. The centres organise, from time to time, support groups and gatherings tailored to their needs and extend service hours to meet clients' needs.

## Child Care Services

19. The SWD subsidises NGOs to provide a wide range of child care services to support parents who, for various reasons, are unable to take care of their children. These include child care centres, Occasional Child Care Service, Extended Hours Service and Mutual Help Child Care Centres. Families with financial and social needs may apply to the Student Financial Assistance Agency for fee assistance under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme. Moreover, NGOs also operate After School Care Programmes for primary students on a self-financing and fee-charging basis. Parents who have financial

difficulty and are unable to take care of their children during after-school hours may apply to the SWD for half fee reduction or full fee-waiving subsidies when using these after-school care services.

20. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF), which promotes mutual help in the neighbourhood, also provides seed money to assist members of the community in developing mutual help networks and in enhancing the capacity of the neighbourhood to provide mutual support and services, such as child care services, to needy families. In the past five years, the CIIF has provided over \$110 million to fund more than 140 projects, about one-third of which have a child care or after-school care element.

21. We are aware that some parents are unable to take care of their children due to various reasons such as work. However, the opening hours of various regular child care services may not be able to address their needs. In view of this, we will promote different forms of flexible child care services. In addition to providing financial incentives to Mutual Help Child Care Centres to enhance their services in the evenings, at weekends and on holidays, the SWD has also subsidised foster homes and some small group homes to provide non-residential day care services since October and December 2007 respectively.

### Women's Health

22. In respect of women's health, the Department of Health has three Women Health Centres and 10 Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) with women's health services to provide women with various services for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases, including physical checkups, individual counselling and other forms of health education. In addition, the 31 MCHCs across the territory and the Obstetrics Department of public hospitals also jointly provide free and comprehensive antenatal care for pregnant women, including regular checkups, blood test and health education. Physical checkups and family planning services are also available for postnatal women.

## **Support for Victims of Domestic Violence**

23. The Government is committed to combating domestic violence. In the past three years, we have taken further measures and allocated additional resources to strengthen the support for victims of domestic violence and families in need. In 2007/08, over HK\$1.43 billion has been allocated. We will continue to provide additional resources to strengthen the direct support for victims of domestic violence, including increasing the provision of residential places in refuge centres for women and enhancing SWD's hotline services. SWD will also continue to organise promotion and public education programmes to raise public awareness on domestic violence, build up social capital and foster a society of mutual care and stronger resilience. At the same time, the SWD will strengthen training for relevant frontline professionals and further promote inter-disciplinary collaboration.

24. The SWD has since January 2006 implemented the pilot project of batterer intervention programme, providing treatment to batterers put on probation by the court and to those who join the programme on a voluntary basis. In addition, a new anti-violence programme has been introduced under the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill with a view to changing the abusive attitude and behaviour of different types of abusers. Besides, the SWD will also embark on a pilot review mechanism for child death cases in the first quarter of 2008. The review mechanism aims to examine the practice and service issues pertaining to child death cases, and identify patterns and trends for formulation of prevention strategies, and promote multi-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation in the prevention of child death.

## **Support for Victims of Sexual Violence**

25. With regard to the support for victims of sexual violence, SWD together with various government departments conducted a review in 2006 on the services provided to victims of sexual violence and the services coordination among relevant departments and professions. A new service model was introduced. An important feature of the new service model is that a social worker will be designated as a "case manager" to provide immediate support and follow-up service to the

victim, such as emotional support, counselling, escorting and accompanying the victim to go through all necessary procedures like reporting to police, receiving medical treatment and forensic examination. The support network covers different regions of the territory and the designated social worker will provide 24-hour outreach services irrespective of the location of the victim or which party the victim has first contacted. SWD will also strengthen coordination of services among different departments and units to provide victims with a client-oriented and one-stop service. Victims can receive services and go through all relevant procedures in a convenient, safe, confidential and supportive environment, which minimises the need for the victims to repeat their unpleasant experience.

26. In addition, with funding support from the Lotteries Fund, SWD commissioned the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals to establish a new crisis intervention and support centre, the CEASE Centre, on a pilot basis for three years. The CEASE Centre has commenced operation since March 2007, providing 24-hour immediate intervention and support service for victims of sexual violence. A 24-hour hotline (18281) manned by registered social workers has been set up to allow victims of sexual violence to directly seek help at any time. There is also a 24-hour professional referral hotline available with which professionals (e.g. police officers, healthcare personnel and social workers) are able to contact the social workers of the Centre directly and make immediate referral if necessary.

27. The new service model has been operating smoothly and SWD will continue to enhance coordination with the relevant social service units, Hospital Authority, Police as well as the Forensic Pathology Service of the Department of Health to ensure the provision of timely and appropriate support for victims of sexual violence.

### **Enhancing Women-friendly Facilities in the Community**

28. Relevant government departments have also taken active steps to improve the community facilities to meet the needs of women, such as providing more water closet cubicles for female and breastfeeding facilities.

29. For example, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has since April 2004 increased the water closet ratio (female to male) from 1.5:1 to 2:1 in the provision of public toilet facilities. The Buildings Department also issued a practice note in May 2005, which required an increase in the number of female toilets in shopping arcades, cinemas and public entertainment premises.

30. In addition, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has included breastfeeding room as a standard provision in the planning of major new leisure facilities in order to meet the needs of women. Consideration will also be given to providing breastfeeding rooms wherever feasible when existing leisure facilities are renovated or upgraded. At present, there are breastfeeding rooms in six recreation and leisure facilities under LCSD. In the next three years, the LCSD plans to provide breastfeeding rooms in 12 newly built recreation and leisure facilities and in 14 existing facilities being renovated or upgraded.

## **Conclusion**

31. The Government will continue to work closely with the WoC to promote the well-being and interests of women through providing an enabling environment, empowering women and launching public education. We will also actively collaborate with various sectors of the community to change and transform the deep-seated concept and culture of society with a view to reducing gender prejudice and stereotype, thereby achieving the goal of equal opportunities in development for both genders.

## **Labour and Welfare Bureau**

**February 2008**

(incorporating information from relevant policy bureaux/departments)

**Motion debate on “Gender equality”  
held at the Legislative Council meeting  
of 12 December 2007**

**Motion moved by Hon Audrey Eu  
as amended by Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye**

“That the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by the United Nations specifically requires States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women in political, social, economic and cultural aspects for the purpose of guaranteeing women the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men; however, as women in Hong Kong at present still face many barriers politically, economically and socially, etc, and are denied equal opportunities for development, this Council urges the Government to adopt more proactive measures to cater for their needs, so that both sexes can enjoy equal opportunities for development; such measures should include:

- (a) eliminating discrimination and prejudices which are based on sex or stereotyped roles for men and women, and giving full respect and development opportunities to women;
- (b) appointing more women to advisory and statutory bodies to encourage their participation in community affairs;
- (c) increasing resources to support women from the grassroots, including new arrivals and single mothers;
- (d) enhancing training to help women in need to upgrade their skills, and launching adaptation programmes to help women who have left the employment market to re-enter it;
- (e) improving child care services to encourage women to go out for work;

- (f) actively promoting the Capacity Building Mileage Programme to help women equip themselves in different aspects, so that they can meet different challenges;
- (g) allocating more resources to curb domestic violence and support the victims of such violence;
- (h) allocating more resources to support victims of sexual violence; and
- (i) providing more women-friendly facilities in the community, such as more water closet cubicles for female.”