

THE HONG KONG COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

Comments on the Initial Report on Hong Kong under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

As a concerned NGO on the implementation of CEDAW in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service has the following comments:

1. *Article 2 - To condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, and to pursue by appropriate means and without delay*

The Sex Discrimination Ordinance enacted in 1996 placed strong emphasis on gender issues related to work and employment. It does not address all other forms of discriminations against women. While employment is important to women, the Ordinance neglects other areas such as the mass media in which the women's image was often quoted or portrayed as sex objects. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) which was set up in 1996, is confined to the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. It is not the mechanism which is charged with responsibility to eliminate all forms of discriminations against women who are placed in a disadvantageous position.

2. *Article 11 - To eliminate discrimination against women in field of employment*

Statistics show that a large proportion of women receive less salary (around 80%) than that of men for engaging in the same type of work¹. In addition, unpaid domestic work done by women in family receives no recognition. The forthcoming policy on Mandatory Provident Fund only covers full-time paid workers; hence women engaging in unpaid domestic work or part-time jobs are, again, being neglected. Overseas experiences could be considered to develop measures to cover the retirement protection for these women, who have to stay at home to take up caring responsibility.

3. *Article 12 - to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning*

Hong Kong Government has adopted a narrow policy and programmes focus on women's health, with exclusion of girls, unmarried and other women. Hong Kong government needs to widen the philosophy of services so that they are not primarily targeted at women as childbearers, and women's health needs should be examined along a spectrum of overall needs throughout their lives. In addition, focus should also be on the following three areas:

- a) improve the accessibility of women's health services
- b) promote women health education
- c) conduct gender-sensitive training to health professionals

¹ Please refer to table 1.

4. *Article 13 - to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life*

About half of the 150 new arrivals from Mainland China coming to Hong Kong each day are women. These women, at personal level and as mother and wife in the families, often face multidimensional problems in adjusting to their lives in Hong Kong. While resources have been devoted to looking after the new arrivals, they are largely focused on family and children. Not much of these are directed towards women. There is an urgent need for special measure to help these women to integrate into the society, to help them to participate in social, economic and recreational activities and to conduct research to explore their specific needs.

5. *Article 16 - to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations*

1200 cases of battered spouses were reported in the year 1997-1998. Among the known cases, a majority (over 92%) of the victims were women. Domestic violence remains a major threat against women. For cultural and economic reason, even a larger number of the battered women would not report and make their cases known. Public education to encourage the victims to come forward reporting; services such as anonymous hotline to make help more available and measures to eliminate practices that slight the seriousness of situation faced by women being victims in domestic violence, are required.

Conclusion

To achieve gender equality under the CEDAW, the HKSAR Government should set up a central body to:

- a) Comprehensively review the situation/needs of women in Hong Kong so as to formulate women policy, to direct funding and to provide a mechanism to identify the needs and coordinate the scattered resources and services among government departments and NGOs.
- b) Examine the progress of implementing and to educate the public on the CEDAW in Hong Kong.
- c) Support NGOs to provide women services and carry out women's research programmes through setting up a funding for women.

26 November, 1998

Table 1: Median monthly employment earnings by Occupation of main employment and Sex
4th Quarter 1996 and 3rd Quarter 1997

<u>Occupation of Main employment</u>	<u>1996 (4th Quarter)</u>			<u>1997 (3rd Quarter)</u>		
	<u>Male</u> (HK\$)	<u>Female</u> (HK\$)	<u>Overall</u> (HK\$)	<u>Male</u> (HK\$)	<u>Female</u> (HK\$)	<u>Overall</u> (HK\$)
Managers & administrators	23,000	20,000	22,000	30,000	25,000	28,000
Professionals	28,000	23,000	25,000	30,000	24,100	30,000
Associate professionals	15,000	15,000	15,000	16,000	15,000	15,000
Clerks	9,000	8,900	9,000	10,000	9,000	9,500
Service workers & shop sales	10,000	7,000	9,000	10,000	7,500	9,000
Craft and related worker	10,000	7,500	10,000	10,000	7,500	10,000
Plant and machine operators And assemblers	10,000	5,500	9,000	10,000	6,000	10,000
Elementary occupations	7,500	3,800	5,500	8,000	4,000	6,000
Others	N.A.	N.A.	5,500	N.A.	N.A.	7,000
Overall	10,500	8,000	10,000	11,000	8,500	10,000

Source: Census and Statistics Department