

A Report from All-China Women's Federation

1. All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), founded in 1949 and in general consultative status with UN ECOSOC acquired in 1996, is the largest women's NGO in China. ACWF has an umbrella-like network with local branches throughout the country and enjoys close and direct contacts with grassroots women. Its mission is to represent and safeguard women's rights and interests as well as to promote gender equality. For this purpose, ACWF, over the years, has carried out a lot of advocacy work to promote gender awareness and gender equality, and lobbied actively for legislation on gender equality and the rights and interests of women and children. It has also taken on activities of various forms to encourage and support women to take part in politics and the management of social and public affairs, as well as to participate in social and economic development.

2. As a women NGO engaged to advance the status of women and to promote gender equality, we are concerned with the forthcoming universal periodic review of China's human rights condition next February. We recognize that the Chinese government has been making great efforts to protect and promote human rights in China in the past years, including women's equal rights, and achievements in this regard are also remarkable. However there are still some problems. This report will mainly focus on two issues, i.e. women in politics and violence against women.

3. With regard to women in politics, we notice that the Chinese government has made policies to ensure that women make up certain percentage on the election shortlist, that the *National Program for the Development of Chinese Women 2001-2010* adopted in 2001 also has defined objectives and counter-measures to promote women's representation in politics and decision-making, and that various leadership training programs have been especially organized for women.

4. However, we also regret to see that since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, when many other countries have made outstanding progress on women's participation in politics, though there is also some progress in China, the progress is small and slow. Taking the proportion of women parliamentarians for example, the percentage of women deputies to the National People's Congress in China has been remaining about 21% ever since 1978. Women deputies made up 20.2% at the Tenth National People's Congress (2003--2007). At the newly elected Eleventh National People's Congress, the percentage is 21.33%, with a mere growth of 1.13 percent point. According to the world classification chart of the percentage of women parliamentarians by Inter-Parliamentary Union, China's ranking fell from No.15 in 1998 to No. 52 in 2008. Similar problems remain with rural women's participation in politics and democratic decision-making. In China's directly-elected villagers' committee, women accounted for 23.2% of the members in 2006. Compared with 2003 when the percentage was only 16.1%, the progress is obvious. Still this is disproportional to the fact that rural women account for half of rural population and do most of the labor in the fields. Another problem is that many of the women taking leadership positions are concentrated in those areas and positions which are typically

considered to be suitable for women, and among all the leaders, more women assume deputy position with fewer taking chief ones.

5. In the midterm evaluation of the implementation of China's *National Program for the Development of Chinese Women 2001-2010* carried out in 2006, Chinese government admitted that they may fail to achieve targets set for women's political participation, including the proportion of women deputies to the National People's Congress and the proportion of women in the villagers' committee.

6. We consider that the government should make clearer and stronger political commitment to take active measures in this regard. For instance, viable and compulsory objectives and proportion requirement for women's participation in politics could be set up, with corresponding mechanism and measures for monitoring and evaluation. Importance should not only be given to the increase of the proportion of women in politics, but also to the structure and quality of women's political participation, so as to ensure that women could really and equally participate in the whole process of social and public affairs management. Moreover, the government should also take measures to improve the social and cultural environment and try to advocate for changes in the stereotyped gender culture so as to create an environment conducive to women's political participation.

7. As for violence against women, we notice that in recent years China has revised and improved relevant laws to eliminate and crack down all forms of violence against women. For example, the Marriage Law, revised in 2001, clearly outlaws domestic violence, and the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests revised in 2005 includes articles against violence against women and sexual harassment. Besides, 25 of China's provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have also formulated and released local laws on the prevention and elimination of domestic violence.

8. We acknowledge that the promotion and protection of women's legitimate rights has been at the core of China's *National Program for the Development of Chinese Women 2001-2010* during its formulation and implementation, and that measures have been taken to set up a government-led cross-sectoral cooperation mechanism on violence against women. We are also glad to see that at the end of 2007, the government especially issued a *National Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children 2008-2012*. We also notice that training on gender awareness and violence against women has been provided for decision-makers and officials at various levels to change the traditional thinking of domestic violence is privacy and to enhance their gender sensitiveness to violence against women. Throughout the country thousands of law advisory and legal service centers for women and children have been established, and shelters in various forms have also been provided for women victims to deliver relevant legal advisory, counseling, shelter, medical help and care, psychological assistance and other services.

9. In spite of all these efforts made by the government, in reality there still exist acts and cases of violence against women, such as trafficking in women and children, gender-based domestic violence, sexual harassment, killing and abandonment of girl babies, and etc.. Shelters and assistance available for women victims of violence fall

short of needs in reality.

10. So far, China has yet to make a specific national law on domestic violence. Current articles and regulations relating to domestic violence fall scattered in several laws including the Marriage Law, the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Children, and the Criminal Law. Moreover they lack applicability to some extent, and effective monitoring mechanism on their implementation is yet to be in place as well.

11. Therefore, we call on China to consider the formulation of a specific law on domestic violence in its national legislation plan, and putting it into effect soon. China should also revise and improve its current relevant laws before the formal introduction of a national law on domestic violence. During the legislation process including drafting the new law and amending the old ones, it is our hope that the civil society including scholars, researchers and non-governmental organizations should be fully consulted.

12. We believe that gender bias and discrimination in people's thinking as well as in reality is the fundamental reason behind the various forms of violence against women. The government should firstly take concrete measures to integrate gender awareness into all processes of decision-making and implementing and to ensure that China's basic state policy of gender equality be fully carried out and turned into reality in all spheres of life. It is also important to design and collect authoritative data on the various forms of violence and to carry out relevant in-depth research from gender perspective. The government should strengthen the current mechanism of government-led cross-sectoral cooperation to fight against violence against women, and increase gender awareness among those working for police, courts, judicial organs, procuratorial organs, educational departments, health departments, media, social services, and etc. in its gender mainstreaming strategy so as to improve cooperation among these relevant departments and ensure women's equal and legitimate rights. The government should also set up more shelters, improve the current reporting system and support system for victims so that the abused women could receive timely and effective assistance and support, including medical help and psychological assistance.

13. We realize that China is undergoing a fast social and economic transition which brings many new problems and makes old ones more complicate, and that the government hence faces great difficulties and challenges. However we do hope that through the forthcoming universal periodic review of China's human rights, the government would further strengthen its political will and take more active measures to promote the realization of gender equality in China.