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<th>Women and politics in Asia and the Pacific.</th>
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Overview Paper:

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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(Presented to the Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making, sponsored by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), held in Bangkok, Thailand, on December 18-19, 1995).

Statistics compiled by the United Nations (World's Women: Trends and Statistics, 1970-1990) show that women's participation in political decision-making, as of 1987, was highest in Mongolia at 24.9 per cent of all parliamentary seats, followed by China with 21.2%, People’s Republic of Korea, with 21.1%, Viet Nam, with 17.7%, and Iraq, with 13.2%. Countries in the region with more than five per cent of all seats in parliament occupied by women included Syria (9.2%), Bangladesh (9.1%), Pakistan (8.9%), Israel (8.3%), India (8.3%), Nepal (5.8%), and Malaysia (5.1%). Of the handful governments which appointed women to ministerial level positions, Bhutan topped the list (28.65), followed by the Philippines (10%) and Cyprus (6.7%). The few other countries in the region with women in ministerial posts were Sri Lanka (5.1%), Indonesia (4.9%), Israel (3.2%), Papua New Guinea (2.9%), and Bangladesh (2.8%). Overall, the picture shown is that of poor representation of women in government.

Present figures do not show much improvement.

In Japan, a developed country and the region's leading economy, Senator Tamako Nakanishi took note of the latest survey of SORIFU (national machinery for gender equality) in June 1995. Its findings show that that in the Lower House of the Diet, 2.1 per cent of the seats are occupied by women, while in the Upper House of the Diet, women occupy 13 per cent of all seats.

In Singapore, a leading NIC in the region and part of the "East Asian miracle," Kanwaljit Soin, an expert on women issues in Singapore, reported that "women's empowerment has hardly been a consideration of policymakers." This is understood in the context of patriarchal attitudes. "Singapore society," Ms. Soin admits, "operates on a patriarchal basis with male supremacy as the accepted norm."

Taiwan, on the other hand, which is also considered a part of the East Asian miracle, submits a considerably high number of women in its parliament. Jenny Ma, a member of the Taiwan Parlia
ment herself, reported that of the total 225 seats in the 1991 Second National Assembly, 31 seats were occupied by women. During the 1992 Second Term Legislative Yuan of a total 125 seats, 42 were held by women.

The aforesaid statistics show that in Asia and the Pacific countries, developing and developed alike, the fact remains: women are under-represented in political decision-making.

This is confirmed by the latest statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's ranking of proportion of female Diet members. Of the Asia and Pacific countries, the top ten countries in the region as shown in the IPU record is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Name of Country</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>65</td>
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Japan ranks 149 in the IPU record, with 2.7 per cent, Australia ranks 73 with 8.2, Singapore at 130 with 3.7 per cent, and Korea at 164 with 1.0 per cent. All of the nine countries without any women representation in the parliament are from the region, namely: Bhutan, Djibouti, Kiribati, Kuwait, Mauritania, Micronesia, Guinea, Saint Lucia, and United Arab Emirates.

Contrasting Scenes

There are no simple explanations to the contrasting scenes of women in public life and leadership in the Asia-Pacific landscape.

For instance, there is a unique gallery of past and present female heads of governments in the Asia-Pacific region (in fact, the largest number in the world) composed of remarkable women leaders: Golda Meir, Indira Ghandi, Corazon C. Aquino, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Benazir Bhutto, Hasina Wazed, Khaleda Zia. At least two of them held power for decades. Three of the aforementioned leaders enabled the region to claim 30% of the world's total number of women head of governments by end of 1994, a record which the United Nations described as "a historically unprecedented figure."

And yet, the Asian and Pacific female masses are largely poor, illiterate, and more likely to fall into the quagmire of abject deprivation, low in social status and nil in political clout.
Worse, poverty statistics are all over the place, a paradox when we consider the strong regional economic performance. One finds it hard to explain that gaps between the political and economic areas remain unbridged in most countries in Asia and the Pacific region despite its vast reservoir of resources and potentials, both human and material.

This disparity has been noted likewise in the social fields. For instance, while the life expectancy of women in Eastern, Southern, and Western Asia has increased by 10-11 years between the period 1970/1975 and 1990/1995, according to figures released recently by the United Nations, it is not taken on a bright note altogether. The health of women 15-45 years of age in these areas and elsewhere in the rest of Asia and the Pacific region remains influenced by their reproductive and maternal roles.

Truth to tell, the morbidity and mortality rates related to reproductive health are unnecessarily high in many parts of the region, a fact that points to an inability of the mass of Asian women to take full charge of making decisions for themselves on matters related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Worse, about 80 percent of pregnant women in South Asia suffer from anemia, the highest record of this debility in the world. South Asia is also the only place in the world where the life expectancy of females is shorter than the life expectancy of males.

To underscore the paradox, South Asian women leaders hold a rare achievement—gaining the highest political office as well as tenacity in keeping populist leadership. Mrs. Bandaranaike, Mrs. Wazed, Mrs. Zia, and Ms. Bhutto—all of them are from South Asia.

In July this year, our colleagues from the Pacific island countries came together in a conference to tackle issues on gender and governance in the sub-region. The participants recommended that a Women in Politics Pacific Centre be established to work for women’s equal access to power through transformative politics.

Of late, a number of Asian countries rose to the pinnacle of economic achievement—known either as tiger economies (e.g. Japan, Singapore, South Korea, China) or emerging new industrializing economies (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia). But how do the women figure in the scheme of things in these countries? How do they figure in politics and decision-making?

In Western Asia, there are no women in political decision-making positions in government, although the UN cites that 3.9% decision makers in the sub-region’s social fields are women.

If it matters at all, the UN has also noted that in its first 50 years, delegations with the least number of women (8-9%) include those from Southern and Western Asia.
Jean Drage, writing about New Politics in the South Pacific, pointed out that in the early 90s, women in legislatures occupied only 6.0 percent of the seats in Micronesia, 4.0 per cent in Polynesia, and 1.6 per cent in Melanesia.

Populist women leaders, including those in political oppositions and the NGO sector, are apparently not wanting. But they remain outside public life and decision-making positions in Government. Only a few ever get seats in legislatures or in cabinet and ministerial posts.

As if to stretch our paradox a bit more, Bangladesh submitted a noteworthy increase in the number of women in their civil service in 1991, due mainly to the introduction of the quota system a couple of years back. But that's just about all.

A View From the Philippines

In my country, the Philippines, for another instance, a good number of women have been elected to the national legislature and local executive posts in the recent elections.

The latest performance of women in key Philippine political decision-making areas is as follows:

- Senate 4 out of 24 or 17%
- Lower House (composed of congressional district representatives) 21 out of 200 or 10%
- Cabinet 2 out of 20 or 10%

The local executive seats won by women (governorship, mayoralty) remain at about 10 per cent. A sectoral seat for women in the Lower House as well as in each of the 1,600 local legislative assemblies have also been prescribed by law, exclusive for women candidates. But that is just about all there is.

In the Philippine career service, about 24.9 per cent of executives in the national government are women. Of the three constitutional commissions such as the Commission on Elections, Commission on Audit, and Civil Service Commission, one is headed by a woman. This has been so since the administration of President Corazon C. Aquino, and followed by President Fidel V. Ramos.

In the diplomatic service, Filipino women have relatively high representation: 27.5 per cent of all foreign service and home employees in 1984. It has not changed much since.

Most of the successful political women candidates in the Philippines, however, are either members of a political family or supported by major political parties. More often than not, the success of some women who gain political leadership has been attributed to the patronage they enjoy. Mainly, family connections and support of political power brokers among the moneyed
elite with interests to protect other than the welfare of the masses.

One is tempted to submit that the foregoing is an indictment of our women's passivity. But then, one defers from rushing rashly into any conclusion. A rural town in the province of Bulacan, north of Manila, the women have shown in the latest village elections that something can be changed. No less than 85 women run for elective positions in the village government, and 38 of them won. This happened after the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics and its partner national organization trained the women on electoral political participation. The San Miguel women's experience seems to point to the possibility that effective training in politics can spell a lot of difference—for the women.

The Pacific island women who meet in late July this year and tackled issues on gender and governance have noted that women still have a long way to go in their struggle for political parity with men not only because theirs is a "vicious problem," but because "the cultural subjugation of women had its origins at the dawn of human society."

The Asia-Pacific Women in Political Decision-making Positions

Decision-making positions in Government are defined by the United Nations Secretariat as well as by the United States National Standards Association as follows:

- Ministers or equivalent deputy or assistant ministers or equivalent;
- Secretaries or equivalent or permanent secretaries or equivalent;
- Deputy of state or director of Government or equivalent.

Women are poorly represented in top echelons of government in Asia and the Pacific region. This is also true in the other regions of the world.

A study in 1987-1988 showed that while women have achieved at least 10 per cent of ministerial level positions in two countries (Bhutan and the Philippines), the governments in 30 other countries in Asia and the Pacific did not have any woman in ministerial level position during the same period.

In 1990, only 3.5 per cent of the world's cabinet ministers were women. The figure at present has barely changed that. In the same year, UN statistics show that women were shut out of all the decision-making jobs at the four highest levels of government in 16 Asia-Pacific countries.
If there are ministries led by women in government, such areas are usually education, culture, social welfare and women's affairs. These are social fields that men obviously do not desire to head because they demand playing roles that are perceived to be traditionally "for women." Even so, women's representation and influence in decision making along these fields have been observed to be negligible.

Seldom are women appointed to executive, economic, justice, and legal ministries or key agencies of line functions. Men head of states apparently assign only to their male colleagues cabinet portfolios in defense, economic planning, political affairs, environmental policies, and health services. In one's country, no woman has ever been appointed as Executive Secretary, not even during the administration of Philippines' first woman president.

That women also rarely achieve elective office or have access to political careers is confirmed by the most recent statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The latest figures provided by the IPU are telling:

- Women parliamentarians in Asia - 12.7%
- Women parliamentarians in the Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand - 7.5%

In decision-making positions in government leadership or in the legislature, we are still quite far off the 30% quota of women in public life which was suggested by the United Nations to governments around the world.

What seems to prevent women from fully participating in politics? Recent studies revealed some of them, as follows:

- Cultural barriers and social conventions
- A male-dominated political culture
- Strong prejudicial attitude against women candidates
- Sexism and exploitation of women
- Fear of getting unwittingly coopted into perpetuating a political system that is riddled with corruption
- Want of a clean and ideologically acceptable political party to be identified with

To even the playing field, so to speak, and remove the barriers that prevent women from becoming equally involved in politics, the Platform for Action of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing September this year listed down 12 critical areas of concern which were identified as main obstacles to the advancement of women. The Platform offered corresponding strategic objectives and actions to be taken by the various governments, the international community, the NGOs and the private sector over the next five years to remove the existing barriers.

These barriers are in the areas of Poverty, Education,

In the parallel meeting, the NGO Forum on Women held in Huaairou, of the 5,000 activities that were held, topping the list of most requested activities were Economics and Political Empowerment, in that order.

It is worth pointing out that the approved Plan of Action of the aforementioned UN Conference provided power sharing. The document provides: “States are to commit to the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and political parties in order to eliminate discrimination. They are to ensure gender balance in the composition of delegations to the UN and other international fora.

The women also intend to make sure that governments abide by the declaration through the following means:

- Monitor and evaluate progress on the representation of women at all levels in decision-making in the public and private sectors.

- Protect and promote the equal rights of women and men to political activities and freedom of association, including membership in political parties.

The Asia-Pacific women have, in fact, working for the implementation of a similar but more expansive plan for action for since 1992, with the establishment of the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP).

Why Women? What Politics?

One would like to proceed with the contention that Asia and the Pacific region needs more women whose political careers, as pointed out earlier by Rita Mae Kelly and Mary Boutilier in their book The Making of Political Women: A Study of Socialization and Role Conflict and quoted by our colleague Rounaq Janan of South Asia, should be "shaped from the beginning by their own choices, attributes and efforts, grounded in a strong sense of their own political efficacy," rather than "mediated" by a male relative.

In one's country, we refer to these mediators as "political dynasties," powerful families which are usually headed by political patriarchs who dispenses patronage to neophyte politicians in their bailiwick. These patriarchs choose their preferred candidates in various positions of consequence to their interests. They can make or unmake a political leader.

These wealthy and powerful families appear to be like a mafia, whose economic fortunes are entwined with political power
in such a way that they cannot loosen their grip on the latter without endangering their supremacy in the former. And vice-versa. It is of no wonder then that vested interests are common fare in our political life. It is also because of these interests that most of our women politicians act merely as proxies of the political patriarch or the economic baron. Or of both.

Only when a woman defies social conventions and cultural barriers can she ever walk into the political arena as an independent, idealistic, political reformist and win in hotly contested elections. But then if you are of this type, it is more likely that you will be dismissed as either an oddity or an ambitious interloper.

We present a sad picture of politics in many countries that can probably be redone by adding into the frame more significant hues, like women's perspective, developmental experience, and adherence to democratic principles—to improve its beauty rather than destroy it altogether.

Women and Politics

When one talks about Philippine politics, one could significantly be talking about the other societies in Asia or in the Pacific as well. In fact, the Philippine political situation is not an isolated case.

This situation should provide more reason for women to come together and take a serious look at the things obtaining in the region's political sphere and, after a reasonable analysis, envision a new political ideology for Asia-Pacific if necessary.

That is also one of the main reasons why the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics convened in Manila the First Asia-Pacific Congress Women in Politics in June 1984. The Congress defined and articulated our vision of transformed and transformational politics.

We agreed in that Congress that the women of Asia and the Pacific should make politics their business if they are to change some of the abominable practices in our political cultures. Women and politics cannot remain strangers any longer if we are to move from the margins of power and decision making in government to the centers of practice and participation in governance. And good governance to boot.

What kind of politics is it that should be women's business?

The plenary statement of the women at the Second Congress of Asia-Pacific Women in Politics in Hanoi last September has articulated the women's essential political interventions as follows:

"It is time to develop and strengthen the feminist perspec-
tive in politics, a perspective that says no to money politics, mafia, and manipulations by power brokers. Good governance has been identified as a priority thrust of the United Nations Development Programme. Good governance requires participatory democracy which cannot be achieved without equality in politics.

One would like to add what Sally Helgesen, a leading expert on women and management, has written about women’s leadership in the years ahead. Says she: “As outsiders to the mainstream public sphere, women have a fresh perspective and, therefore, the potential to emerge as an extraordinarily valuable resource.” Honed by experience in the private sphere, “in which values of interconnectedness and relationships have always held primary importance.”

Ms. Helgesen further asserted that “since these values are increasingly perceived as the principles by which our universe operates, women’s leadership will be key in finding new solutions to the problems that the world will face in the years ahead.”

Filipino Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani has acknowledged recently that women who get into politics in the Philippines “have to cope with this reality.” At the same time, she also expressed that there is hope for political reform that “can bring about political change.” But that will happen only “if two conditions are fulfilled,” which she cited as follows:

1) “There should be enough qualified candidates, women and men, who not only as the reformists in our political life but who are also seasoned politicians and who can stand up to the most skillful and knowledgeable traditional politicians; and

2) That there will be a large enough electoral support to make possible the victory of these reformists public and elective officials.”

"Political change," Senator Shahani pointed out, "is a process of changing power relationships so that the meaning of the nature of power itself is transformed."

In one of her most recent speeches before an international seminar on the role of women politicians, our own Khunying Supatra Hasdit, president of the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), said that "the power of decision-making and control at all political levels is essential for women to realize the goals we have been fighting for," emphasizing before her audience that only in this way can we shape a political order that does not marginalize women but gives full play to women’s self-empowerment.

Khunying Hasdit reprised what we have all been voicing over and over again these days—that throughout Asia and the Pacific region, women are under-represented in politics despite constitu
tional guarantees of political rights.

Under Khunying Masdit's leadership, we, at the CAPWIP, envision in the horizons of the regional political field the emergence of a transformed and transformational politics.

The Asia-Pacific Women's Vision of Politics

First, let us look at the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) which was set up in 1992 by a group of women from nine countries in the Asia and the Pacific region who are determined to sustain their alternative vision of politics. A politics that is strongly based on development, truly participative and democratic. A politics that is not only of women, by women, and for women but also that which is for a truly humane order for the humankind.

The vision of CAPWIP is for Governments in the Asia-Pacific region to be fully committed to gender equality, gender participation, sustainable development, and peace. Its mission is to help transform politics in the Asia-Pacific region towards one that a) shares political power equally between women and men, b) uses power to meet women's gender needs, and c) is accountable to the people and encourages popular participation. The Center also firmly believes that more women in seats of power and decision-making will have a positive impact on the ways of governing—and therefore on the ends of democracy and development.

Next, let us take a look at our women's vision of transformed and transformational politics as articulated at the First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics in Manila.

"The Asia-Pacific women want politics that is transformed and transformational.

"Transformed because –

- it uses power to create change, to develop people, and to build communities;
- it is non-hierarchical and is participatory in its structures and processes;
- it accords priority to the disadvantaged sectors such as the rural, grassroots, and indigenous women;

"And transformational because –

- it is issue-based, development oriented, and gender responsive;
- it seeks economic, social, and political equity between genders and among sectors;
it builds a society that is just and humane, and a way of life that is sustainable.

Which Way, Women Politicians?

An important fact cannot be ignored: that women face formidable obstacles in participating in politics as well as in advancing to higher decision-making positions in Government.

For obvious reasons, one needs money, skill, experience, support or patronage, contacts, information, and the time to participate and succeed in politics. We cannot delude ourselves with the thought that strong convictions are enough to successfully shield us from the devastating hazards of political battles. To succeed in public life and leadership, women need the wherewithals as well as the competence.

Strategies

To attain our political vision, we believe a select set of strategies are in order. We therefore intend to pave the women's path to successful political careers with the following strategies:

1. Advocating the Women's Agenda. - Existing concepts shall be carefully reviewed by women in politics from a gender-conscious perspective. Viable alternatives shall be put forth, strengthened by new findings through research to be carried by women who are competently informed on the politics in the region. World public opinion will also be mobilized to protest against the misuse of religion in suppressing the fundamental rights of women.

2. Building the Women's Constituency. - The work of women in politics shall emphasize the need to raise the level of women's political awareness through education, training, and the media. This effort shall include voter's education. To achieve unity and consensus on common causes and exercise influence as pressure groups, women networks shall be organized and established in the region, coupled with missions to strengthen international solidarity through the establishment of a global network of women in politics. Under this strategy, the women in politics will also strive to equalize the political socialization of both girls and boys from early childhood through the formal and non-formal educational systems. The educational programs that women in politics would like to promote should include leadership development.

3. Building the Support Machinery. - The Asia-Pacific regional plan for action to guide women in politics emphasizes programs to train potential women leaders in gender sensitivity and leadership skills, especially in political dynamics. The strategy shall look into the possibility of influencing NGOs to allocate more resources for such training programs. Effort shall
be exerted likewise in registering women and creating a pipeline of women to enter the electoral process, while exerting pressure on political parties to build strong foundations for women. It will focus also on recognizing the value of women political volunteers as valuable resources for women in politics.

4. Advocating Key Women’s Concerns. - The strategy shall emphasize the need to increase women’s representation and participation in politics. It will underscore likewise the need to respect the economic, health, and reproductive rights of women, while putting similar emphasis on advancing the issue on women and environment and promoting human rights, particularly the rights of women in indigenous communities.

Priorities

The following were identified by the Asia-Pacific women in politics as priorities to be acted upon by CAPWIP:

1. Education and Training. - Programs that will cater to the needs of women as they go through the different phases of their involvement in the field of politics. The program shall be in three phases: a) getting more women to enter electoral politics, b) training them “how to win,” and c) providing post-election support service.

2. Public Awareness (Media) Campaign - Develop long-term and sustainable strategies to maximize media coverage as a means of raising public awareness of women’s issues.

3. Research and Documentation. - Undertake studies that will provide empirical data that will serve as bases for women’s effective participation in decision-making at all levels of governance.

4. Creating a Political Pipeline. - Set up conduits to get women interested in running for public office.

5. Raising Funds for Women Candidates. - Create a trust fund for women in politics, mount fund campaigns, and establish a financial support system for women’s participation in politics.

6. Lobbying. - An immediate document for adoption or inclusion in significant national, regional or international bodies advocating gender equality is the Asia-Pacific Women in Politics Platform for Action.

At the Second Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics which we convened in Huairou, China last September while the UN Fourth World Conference on Women was also ongoing, our colleagues from the region reiterated their political goals, as follows:

1. Clean and green politics;
2. Women's empowerment thru participatory democracy;

3. Nation-building on the basis of sustainable development, human rights, and social justice;

4. Policies against gender discrimination and harassment of women; against illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and inequality; against corruption, communalism, casteism, and regionalism; and against criminality, violence, and war;

5. New political culture based upon compassion and cooperation; and

6. Regional harmony in the Asia-Pacific region and a humane world system.

The strategies adopted by the Second Congress to supplement the earlier adopted methods include more specific, more objective, and quantifiable results, as follows:

- Women to have 50 per cent representation in all decision-making bodies at every level, following the concept of "half the world, half the power."

- Women to lobby for electoral reforms, with efforts to bring about legal and institutional changes to promote women's political participation. Women will also lobby for constitutional amendments.

- Women to work for equitable quota in political bodies—appointive and elective positions, and in structures of political parties—as a short-term measure to increase the number of women in such bodies.

The regional institution that is mandated by the Congress of Asia-Pacific Women in Politics to carry out the aforementioned plan and strategies is the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP). With main headquarters in Manila, the Center is set to attain its goal to "create a critical mass of competent, committed and effective women politicians in elective or appointive positions in government who will exert influence on national and regional decision-making.

The Center's objectives are to

- Promote and achieve women's political leadership;

- Increase the participation of women in critical number in order to have a significant policy impact nationally and regionally;

- Create an "atmosphere of compliance" among the governments in the region, provide training, research, and other support systems to women and national women's political institutes;
- Collaborate with existing political institutes and women's organizations and encourage as well mutual support among women who are interested in getting into politics;
- Provide briefings on development issues to women politicians with the end in view of assisting them to formulate policies and programs that will advance human achievement; and
- Generate funds through contributions of members, donations, grants, and training fees.

The Center focuses on four priority areas of concern, as follows: a) networking and capacity building, b) education and training, c) media campaigns, and d) research, documentation and publications.

**CAPWIP Sub-Regional Operations**

The Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics serves as a catalyst to the organization of women in politics at the national and sub-regional levels. The Center has the following sub-regions:

- Central Asia
- East Asia
- The Pacific Islands
- South Asia
- Southern Asia

There is a strong movement at the sub-regional level. Together with the regional institution, the CAPWIP, the sub-regional organizations serve as the mechanisms to implement the CAPWIP Asia-Pacific Women in Politics Platform for Action which the women's annual congresses approve and review.

To date, the following has been undertaken at the sub-regional level:

1) Pacific - congress and groundwork for the organization of the different national and sub-regional committees.

2) South Asia - the same efforts as in the Pacific network are also being undertaken.

3) East Asia - congress in Huairou and an international seminar on quality of life and the women political leaders.

4) South East Asia - congress to organize with the Mongolian Federation.

The Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics also initiated the Global Network of Women in Politics, which organization, in turn, appointed CAPWIP as its International Secretariat. India was elected to host the Second Global Congress of Women in Politics in November 1997 after the global organization's landmark
meeting in Huairou. By all intents and purposes, the global movement of women in politics has begun and the global political landscape is sure to change with the plans the women intend on putting into action.

The CAPWIP Board is made up of representatives of the sub-regions and its founding members.

External Allies of the Asia-Pacific Women in Politics.

Not for a moment do we forget that the challenges in this struggle for women's parity in political power and decision are formidable. But we also trust that we will proceed with significant rate of success banking on the infinite capacity of women to sustain a peaceful movement.

After all, the women of Asia and the Pacific region are not wanting in allies and supporters. Fact is, the struggle has already extended beyond the Asian and Pacific shores.

In Huairou, we established the Global Network of Women in Politics. Shortly, we are expecting the chain of political activities by women for women to stretch from key points of the regions to the rest of the world. It is not presumptuous to expect that this network shall increasingly gain strength and visibility in the years ahead. Our allies outside of our organic network--regional or global--will certainly help us sustain this movement for parity and partnership with the other half of the world's population.

Conclusion

In Asia and the Pacific region, as it is perhaps true in other parts of the world, women remain outside the circle of decision-making and government leadership, save for a few female trailblazers. The inequity in the ratio of women to men in public life and governance is not due to women's disinterest, rather it has been due a set of obstacles brought about by cultural and social conventions. It is high time that women make the decisions for their future now; envision what is best for all of us, and work together to attain the goal.

To end, may I leave you with the following statement by our colleague Rounaq Jahan, which I quote, and you may take with you as we all do our work on Women in Politics. She says: "Increased political participation should involve not only greater numbers of women in politics but, more importantly, a qualitative change in political goals and processes: the goals should be set by women's perspectives and priorities, and the processes should be such that women will feel more at ease in participating."

We realize of course that we have to travel a long road. Winding at some points, perhaps. Our march forward have to start
probably with only a few. But as we move on, the mass of Asian and Pacific women will be at the roadsides. In no time, they will be following the lead pack. They will supply the numbers; form the greater mass of our main constituency; and this long and winding road we taking today, to borrow a line from a popular tune, will lead us to the door of political leadership and decision-making.

We hope to enter this door. And walk in the corridors of power. By then, we will be amply armed with experience and competence.

References:


