



## **Hong Kong Women Professionals & Entrepreneurs Association (HKWPEA)**

### **Public Affairs Committee**

#### **Response Paper to the Fourth Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

**25<sup>th</sup> May, 2018**

**Background:** The Hong Kong Women Professionals and Entrepreneurs Association (HKWPEA, our “Association”) is a non-profit organization established in September 1996 by a group of local women professionals and entrepreneurs. We are a group of women professionals, business executives and entrepreneurs who have come together with the following objectives: to develop a strong support network, to create practical and innovative learning and business opportunities for themselves and for others, to promote high professional standards. As we are based in Hong Kong, the Association also has the vision and mission to reach out and try to establish relationship with counterparts in Mainland China and abroad. As part of the Hong Kong community, we are also committed to gather comments and feedbacks from our members through the Public Affairs Committee to provide timely response to the consultation papers of the HKSAR Government on various policy issues. We are committed to provide a well-rounded view with particular reference to perspectives of women professionals and entrepreneurs.

In response to the recent public engagement exercise on the HKSAR government’s preparatory work for the submission of the fourth report of the HKSAR under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (“the Convention”), which will form part of the ninth report of the People’s Republic of China under the Convention, the Public Affairs Committee of the Hong Kong Women Professionals & Entrepreneurs Association (HKWPEA) has been actively collecting the views, comments and proposals with regard to the aforesaid issue, and that has been discussed within us with our representative also attending the public consultation session held earlier on by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB). This response paper serves to provide a summary of the collective opinions and views of the HKWPEA.

## **Definition of Discrimination**

In terms of definition of discrimination, while Hong Kong has been a metropolitan city with advocacy of women empowerment at all levels and across sectors, there have still been non-measurable or intangible elements of discrimination at work and within the family, such as verbal and non-verbal cues among peers or from senior to the junior staff members, and limitation of equal access to career development or advancement, these are not limited just to subtle personal prejudice among peers or between superior and subordinates or vice versa.

## **Stereotyping and Prejudice**

While there has been increasing advocacy of equal access to career development and equal access to career enhancement, many vocations are still being predominantly by male or vice version with lack of balance of equal sex distribution.

For professional or entrepreneur development, a lot of times, when it comes to leadership position or senior executive position, many women might have dropped off the career development ladder sacrificing their career for better family care and raising young kids in young family and there has been lack of flexibility after exit from any career development with no re-entry pathway or directions.

Women, at the moment, including the situation in Hong Kong, are still regarded as the main carer of the family, even though if they are single, as they are expected by social norm to look after the parents, the senior citizens, or young kids or a sick family member. There is lack of job sharing from the male counterpart of the male family members within the same family. Equally, taking the maternity leave and the paternity leave as an example, even if the husband of a young family is willing to do much more job sharing or to share the obligation and enjoyment of parenthood, there is still a disproportion of the duration of the maternity leave as compared do the paternity leave.

## **Equality in Education**

With the persistent lack of childcare support in the community at large, and the increasing unrealistic demand from the education system with advocacy and social pressure of full-time mothers being highly commended which might even affect the admission entrance of school kids at young age, such as kindergarten or primary education, many working women were forced to give up their career with good prospects to put their family and young kids as their priority.

In parallel, due to the social preconception or expectation of women being the main household home-maker, they have never started at the same starting point with their male counterparts. And it is anticipated that in terms of career development, and education enhancement,

especially for any tertiary or post-graduate education advancement, women usually need extra years to catch up for many of them have sacrificed at house-hold chores and serving as home-makers especially for young family before they could be free to take up new positions or further equip themselves with education advancement.

### **Equality in Employment and Labour Rights**

With the same aforesaid background, social and cultural make-up and limitations, and the relatively lack of community child-care support, despite the on-going advocacy of “family friendly working environment” as proposed and led by the HKSAR government, there are still relatively lack of flexible employment for women, from labour, manual work to clerical, secretarial and even worse for professional or leadership or executive position. With globalization and the advancement of multi-media and the advocacy of home office, there should be many more flexible employment offered but just that the provision and availability is still very much limited.

Professionals like medical doctors or those working the public sector like the Hospital Authority, are still having difficult access to flexible employment and professional training while this has been much well developed in the European and North American countries. And this has actually formed part of the reasons for the persistently deficient manpower in the medical profession, and same extending to the nursing profession and paramedical profession. And the education sector as well, just to name a few.

Therefore, women either need to continue to press on and give up starting their family or expanding their family with addition, or they are obliged to quite their job at some point as it is still relatively challenging to balance work and life and family compared to the western culture. With that, there is limited women leadership across entrepreneurs or professionals, and less in the government or corporate formation.

### **Equality in Access to Health Facilities**

Women in Hong Kong have been suffering from relatively difficult access to Health Facilities for various reasons despite Hong Kong has been ranked No. 1 among the world with the longest longevity.

- 1) Firstly, for women who are highly educated or serving as typical working women, following the social trend of long working hours and extending long working hours, there has been relatively imbalance of work and life, and women have been sacrificing their own health. Not only with lack of exercise and sleeping pattern disturbance, for those who are obliged to be the home-maker in the family, they are obliged to perform their ‘second duty’ in the family after office hours at work.
- 2) Secondly, for full-time housewives and home-makers and lack of community childcare or home care support, many women are obliged to serve the nuclear family and even the extended family full time 24 hours all the time, and having no break or interim

access to screening programme or regular medical check-up, not counting the lack of exercise and the persistently chronic sleep deprivation.

- 3) While there has been lack of community child care in Hong Kong, many families rely much to the foreign domestic home helpers who have been dedicated their time to serve many young families or those with senior citizens with multiple comorbidities. Here, the health of these foreign domestic helpers need to be attended to as well. There has been increasing trend of foreign domestic helpers, like Filipino domestic workers or Indonesian workers with delayed diagnosis of cardiovascular disease or cancer with particular reference to women cancers such as breast cancers. They usually present relatively late and at the moment, there is no recommendation on standard procedures for their equal access to standard medical treatment like our local citizens. Many a times, when it comes to treatment of cancer patients, either the extra kind employers support the standard medical treatment for these domestic helpers or these newly diagnosed domestic helpers are forced to return to their homeland with questionable equal access to standard medical care especially with relatively less developed countries or cities compared to the Hong Kong SAR.

Furthermore, there has been relatively less or lower self-awareness of physical, mental or psychosocial well-being and lack of knowledge on common female disease or occupational health hazards, and protected time for “off time”.

### **Equality in Political and Public Life at National Level and International Level**

Further developed from the aforesaid limitations, with limited development in career enhancement or advancement, fewer women compared to men were able to share equal life in political and public life, be it at the national level or the international level. There are indeed fewer well-established women politicians though we have been blessed with our very first women Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR for the first time since the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR.

### **Reflections and Recommendation**

We humbly recommend a further even more comprehensive review along the principles and line of the CEDAW on the equal access to various themes and rights, and perhaps, the Hong Kong SAR government could review and consider enhancing any incentives, such as tax reduction for those directors or employers having solid ground work in support equal access to employment, health facilities or job sharing for their women employees and to consider set up individual focussed groups to review the unmet needs of various stakeholders, especially the working class and those relatively underprivileged in the community, for their challenge will be even much greater with the additional psychosocial and financial burden.

Special focus groups should be set up for different groups such as foreign domestic workers, new women immigrants, working women, women across various backgrounds and education levels, for each of these different groups of women will

have different unmet needs to be addressed, and these collective ideas would be invaluable to the Labour and Welfare Bureau for further reflection and review. Healthy life, healthy family and the access to equal rest and exercise should further be reinforced especially for our women population. The importance of self-care should be further educated and promoted.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, the CEDAW has been a key convention defining various discrimination against women and helping to set various appropriate directions with guiding principles for national action to eliminate such discrimination. Now that we have come to the response to the fourth report, and perhaps it is now prime time for us to translate all the previously defined principles to measurable deliverables, with further expansion of solid programme across Bureaus, disciplines, across sectors and vintage of the population with further connection and collaboration with our regional and international stakeholders, to further listen to the unmet needs of women, with particular reference to special focussed group, from the underprivileged, new immigrants and the lower social class members to the highly educated working women through the working class, and the other unmet needs for foreign workers or foreign domestic workers and full-time home-makers.

The HKWPEA welcomes further “multidisciplinary” approach and more cross-talks between the Women’s Commission and the Labour and Welfare Bureau and across Bureaus and sectors, to further review the current hard wares and soft wares of the community to help further eliminate specific discrimination against women form microscopic level to macroscopic level, thus building an even better, healthier and more harmonious city with our committed Hong Kong SAR Government.