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REALIZING WOMEN'S DREAMS IN THE ASEAN CONTEXT

Ms. Carrie Lam, Chief Secretary for Administration, Government of Hong Kong SAR,

H.E. Mme. Yang Xiuping, Ambassador of the Pweople's republic of China to ASEAN,

Ms. Meng Xiaosi, Vice-President and members of the Secretariat of All-China Women's Federation,

Ms. Regina Leung, Spuse of H.E. C.Y. Leung, Chief executive of the Government of HKSAR,

Ms. Yin Xiaojing, Deputy-Director, Liason Officer of the Cental People's Government in HKSAR,

Tong Xialoling, Deputy Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC in the HKSAR,

Fellow Speakers,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning.

1. It gives me a great pleasure to be here this morning to speak before a very distinguished audience at the International Women's Summit. Before I proceed, I would like to thank the organisers of the event The All-China Women's Federation Hong Kong Delegates Association (ACWF-HK) for the honour to share my thoughts to an eminent group of people here today.

2. 2014 has been declared the year of ASEAN-China Cultural Exchange and I can think of no better place to commemorate this as right here at this summit speaking to women from all walks of life present in this very room.

3. This Summit is an excellent platform for experience sharing and networking as well as offering opportunities for women to collaborate in many areas. With such a network to boost women's leadership, I am certain that you as leaders have and

will continue to contribute enormously towards the progress of women within your own country and the ASEAN region at large.

4. This morning, I would like to share some thoughts in line with today's theme 'Realizing Women's Dreams' and speak of it in the ASEAN context. While this is a topic that is dear to my heart, I also hope that what I am about to offer will stimulate discussion and challenge each one of us here not just today but in the days to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The role of women has evolved tremendously through the years. From traditionally being homemakers to sharing breadwinning responsibilities for their families and participating in the economy. Indeed women have come a long way. Today, women not only bear offspring and nurture their children, but more and more women are active participants in traditionally male-dominated arenas such as academia, politics and security, public policy, business and economy, community development, science and technology.

6. In building an ASEAN Community that is gender responsive by 2015, women's greater role in all spheres of life continues to be promoted and the constant need for women's empowerment is being addressed through Action Lines in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint. This spirit is embedded in one of the purposes of ASEAN to "enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice", as stipulated in the ASEAN Charter.

7. Given the ASEAN's gender-balanced population of over 605 million people, our starting point gives the impression of a positive lead in ASEAN. However gender equality, women empowerment and the promotion of women's leadership in the political, economic and social realms are an uphill challenge.

State of Women within the ASEAN Community

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Since more than two decades ago, countries around the world have been using the Millennium Development Goals as a catalyst to accelerate socio-economic development and eliminate gender disparity across sectors. I am pleased to inform you that to date, with regards to MDG-1, ASEAN Member States are on track in meeting the target of halving the proportion of population below the national poverty lines¹. However, challenges occur in achieving some other gender-related MDG-targets.

9. Even though gender equality has been achieved in the net enrolment ratio in primary school, it is not yet the case in secondary school. Statistics tells us that in at

¹ 2011 ASEAN Statistical Report on The Millennium Development Goals page 8-9

least four ASEAN Member States² there are more girls enrolled than boys. In 2010, there were 120 women for every 100 men attending tertiary education institutions, the only exceptions being Lao PDR and Cambodia. As we move on to the labour force participation, statistics show a jarring discrepancy of gender participation rates in ASEAN. Women make up a less favourable figure for each Member State with regards to labour and employment. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2013 which included nine ASEAN Member States, only one member state was ranked in the top ten and five placed in the bottom half of the ranking.

10. While ASEAN is said to be on track with regards to MDG-4 target of reducing by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate, we are struggling to improve maternal health which falls under MDG-5. Women living in rural areas tend to have limited knowledge of safe pregnancy, limited access to healthcare, midwives and professional birth attendants, all of which affect the maternal mortality ratio (MMR). Why is this so? While we live in such a sophisticated and progressive age, it is really telling that women in ASEAN today still die from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy or its management during pregnancy and childbirth. That is why, even though ASEAN can confidently claim a sex-balanced population, only two countries were placed in the 'Very High Human Development Index' so far.

11. These progress reports are reassuring that ASEAN Member States have shown remarkable progress and are on track to meet the MDG goals. However, progress has been uneven across sub-regions, across countries and across targets. This shows that ASEAN still has much homework to do towards gender equality.

Women's participation in all spheres of life

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Although ASEAN is a young organisation with Member States at different levels of socio-economic development, since its establishment in 1967 there have been four women head of states and proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament in Southeast Asia is 18%. Within the ASEAN family, there have also been 4 female ambassadors out of total of 22 ambassadors of ASEAN Member States who sit on the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN.

13. As you may know, ASEAN cooperation on various thematic areas is being handled by sectoral bodies across the three pillars from ministerial-level, senior officials level, and technical level. Each sectoral body comprises ten representatives from ten ASEAN Member States. Under the ASEAN Political Security Community pillar, currently there is no female minister, and out of ten Senior Official Bodies only 4 out of 40 representatives are women. In the ASEAN Economic Community pillar, partial data shows that there are 2 women out of a total of 80 Ministers who sit in eight Ministerial Bodies; while there are 16 women out of a total 90 representatives

² 2010 statistics in per cent: Cambodia (M=21.1, F= 27.1), Indonesia (M=67.0, F=68.3), Malaysia (M=87.0, F=92.4) Thailand (M=68.2, F=76.2) Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2012 Published by ASEAN Secretariat (August 2013)

at the Senior Official Bodies. Under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community pillar, there are 19 women out of a total of 130 representatives at the Ministerial level and there are 68 women out of a total of 180 representatives in the Senior-level Bodies. Overall, observation would state that in more traditionally female sectors there is a higher number of women's participation. The number is increasing as the level of government officials gets lower.

14. However, there are still many barriers in our societies such as the lack of suitable structures in place that hinder women's greater opportunities to fully participate in economic and political spheres. Those challenges involve quality and cost of child-care services, inflexible working hours, unequal pay for equal work done by men, lack of skills retraining post maternity leave, and the like.

15. We find that these are real problems faced by women in ASEAN Member States. According to the 2011 statistics³ of seven ASEAN Member States, gender disparity in the labour force range between 7.4% to 32.4%. This shows a wide variance between male and female participation in remunerated employment which ASEAN Member States cannot ignore.

16. While it is easy to rattle on about statistics, it is important to note that official statistics very often are unable to capture the true value of women's work and their overall contribution to national wealth. If we look at agriculture statistics for example, reporting lines and official definitions sometimes work against women in failing to capture or recognise their contribution to agricultural activities. As advanced as gender-differentiated data is in agricultural census and household surveys, women's representation is muted to the reality when plotted on charts and graphs⁴.

Milestones in promoting women's advancement and gender equality

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. ASEAN has long recognised and reaffirmed the importance of empowering women for greater participation in all spheres of life. One such initiative has been the adoption of the Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region in 1988, and since then many more initiatives have followed suit to translate the commitment into actions. Multiple regional projects and activities have been convened in ASEAN as a testament to the commitment of Member States towards an ASEAN Community that is violence-free and with gender equality.

18. As time is limited, I would like to highlight only three milestones of ASEAN. One is the establishment of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network in 2012 by the ASEAN Committee on Women. Women entrepreneurs from micro-, small-, and medium-size enterprises from ASEAN Member States are represented in this Network. Associations and economic entities owned or managed by women are also part of the Network. Soon they will meet for the first time on 22-23 April 2014 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. The Network provides a platform for ASEAN women to mentor each

³ ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2012

⁴ FAO repository 'Women's Contribution to Agriculture'.

other and share best practices to explore better ways of doing business and expanding it.

19. In order to strengthen women's machineries in the ASEAN region, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) was established in 2010 and, subsequently, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) in 2011. Over the years, their respective works have been complementing in mainstreaming gender perspective across sectors and pillars, eliminating all forms of violence against women, and promoting greater fulfilment of women's rights. Although the ACWC is a new body, they already spearheaded the development of the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children which was adopted by the Leaders at the 23rd ASEAN Summit in November last year. Immediately, dialogues with civil society and other relevant ASEAN bodies were convened by ACWC in February to identify concrete areas and projects where they can work together to implement the Declaration.

20. It is also important to note the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 as part of the Leaders' commitment to the 1993 Vienna Declaration. Drafted by AICHR, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) was adopted at the 21st ASEAN Summit in 2012. The Declaration acknowledges the rights of women as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

21. In addition, I am also pleased to note that various joint initiatives have been planned and implemented by the ASEAN+3 Committee on Women to promote women's advancement and gender equality. I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to colleagues from the All-China Women's Federation for your active participation in the ASEAN+3 Committee on Women. My appreciation also for the contribution of the China-ASEAN Training Centre to the capacity enhancement of women's machineries from ASEAN Member States since it was established in 2007.

22. ASEAN is at a critical juncture as we are currently assessing the achievements and challenges in building the ASEAN Community since 2009, and at the same time shaping the post-2015 ASEAN agenda. We have a great interest to develop a post-2015 vision and medium-term plan that are inclusive and gender responsive. In doing so, emerging issues across pillars such as female migrant workers, women's entrepreneurship, women as victims and agents of change in response to climate change impact and in disaster risk reduction, are amongst the challenges that need to be addressed in a holistic manner.

23. Efforts towards ASEAN integration are challenged by an evolving development paradigm – one that balances growth with people's welfare, equity in income distribution, and sustainable environment. There are emerging trends in the region as we integrate, such as greater mobility of workers in our region. Mobility of labour in our region is massive. ILO estimated migrant workers in 2010 were 105.5 million out of which over 30 million (or almost 30%) were in Asia. While ASEAN is targeting a greater mobility of professionals, the realities show that most workers

migrating in our region possess mid- and lower-levels of skills and are predominantly women who primarily work as domestic workers. The needs of female migrant workers who may be different than those of male should be acknowledged. Equal pay for equal work needs to be observed by employers. Violence and discrimination against female migrant workers should be prevented and appropriately addressed. All these issues are being addressed in the ASEAN instrument on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers is currently being crafted by ASEAN Member States with the target completion by the end of this year.

24. Facilitating greater mobility of skilled labour and recognition of their skills, ASEAN Member States agreed to liberalize flows of skilled labour across eight priority professions through the signing of the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) in engineering services, architectural services, nursing services, medical practitioners, dental practitioners, accountancy services, surveying qualifications, and tourism professionals. Complementing this, the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework has been developed for adoption by the ASEAN Leaders this year. Full implementation of those MRAs and Framework is expected to take into account the fact the high participation of female labour force in certain sectors, such as nursing services and tourism professionals, and at the same time those tools should be able to encourage women's greater participation in high-skilled work.

25. Lastly, as sustainable environment agenda receives a great attention at global and ASEAN levels, we cannot deny that our region has a high vulnerability to the impacts of disasters caused by natural hazards and continues to suffer disproportionately. According to UN ESCAP data in 2011⁵, during the past decade, an average of more than 200 million people was affected and more than 70,000 people were killed by natural disasters annually. Those figures represent 90% and 65% of the world totals, respectively. Disasters cause death, economic and environmental damage, and severe setbacks for social development. Large-scale disasters in Myanmar in 2008 and recent one in the Philippines highlight the value of national preparedness for disaster. According to UN ESCAP, the effect of disasters on human lives tends to be higher in lower-income countries. Hence, post-2015 ASEAN with a gender-responsive disaster risk reduction strategy is critical. With urbanisation, informal settlers are occupying high-risk areas which increase their vulnerability to disaster impacts. Climatic disasters such as storms and droughts would give impact to the livelihood and agricultural production of rural farmers.

26. Responding to these challenges, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) adopted in 2012, the Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Gender Perspective and ASEAN Women's Partnership for Environmental Sustainability. The Declaration recognises that women represent a large untapped potential for environmental sustainability and the need to mainstream gender perspective and promote women's partnership and participation in sustaining the environment in ASEAN through holistic and effective strategies.

Challenges are hidden opportunities for women

⁵ UN ESCAP's Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. It is important to acknowledge that women's roles in the development of a nation are more than workers or care-givers. Women are also consumers, entrepreneurs, investors, managers, decision makers and mothers. Women pass on wisdom and raise future generations as such, equitable participation of women in the politics, government, economy and social development of any country is essential to the progress of a nation.

28. For this reason alone, policies in place must be carefully tailored towards the needs of women to ensure that such policies benefit and impact both men and women and not just one gender. Planning exercises and implementation need to be mindful of the differences in circumstances of males and females and not be gender blind but rather gender specific to ensure success. Furthermore, education blueprints need to be looked through a gender lens if not already. Education programmes need to be structured to take into account not just gender studies but must include gender perspectives in each field of study from primary to tertiary level. We need to implant leadership confidence to girls since early age.

29. More effort needs to be place to ensure women are able to enjoy the benefits of economic development at every level utilizing their talents to the fullest. With Asia being the driving force in the global economy, nations need to capitalise on female potential to maximise its competitiveness to give it an extra edge. Programmes to better mobilise half of its population for the future must go beyond policies and solid strategies need to be developed to include women working in informal sectors. We know that for now, many countries worldwide including some ASEAN Member States introduce temporary measures of a quota system for women's participation in politics, simply to give women a better chance to climb the ladder. While this may be a positive initiative, it also takes away from the capabilities of women if the sole reasoning is that quotas need to be filled instead of women being chosen by equal merit as their male counterparts. I hope that one day, such temporary measures would no longer be needed in our region because gender equality would be achieved substantially in our region.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

30. As the Chinese proverb states 'Women hold half the sky' and I believe no country will survive the challenges of the 21st century if it chooses not to fully engage half its population. In that vein, the real power in any country is shared power – equal sharing between the genders. Men and women working together leveraging on each other's comparative strengths, experience and knowledge will allow us to make the difference that best suits our circumstances and that is able to bring us to the best level of performance and progress not just within a country but the region.

31. Women's leadership and empowerment is equally the responsibility of men. Women cannot achieve gender equality without the cooperation, participation and support of men. However, many a times, we blame men for the setbacks women

face. In fact, for many, the challenges of women issues are actually not about men limiting women, but about women limiting women. This may be a taboo to acknowledge, but it is something that holds us back and something we need to consciously and actively decide not to do. While it is my sincerest belief that men need to champion gender equality in all spheres of life, it is also our job as women to not be a stumbling block to other women. Only then will our efforts work positively towards achieving a balanced society.

32. In conclusion, I would like to say that I am glad to be here to share and learn from you, as well as to establish stronger networks towards our mutual goal of developing successful female leadership in ASEAN. It is my hope that following this Summit, you will go back with a determination to capitalise on the contributions that you and other women can make and have made and develop it further. And most of all it is my hope that every woman that we are in contact with knows that their dreams are valid, real and worthy. With that, I thank you and look forward to the rest of the Summit.
