Summary of the Seminar on Hong Kong and CEDAW

Organized by the Center for Comparative and Public Law of the Faculty of Law, and the Women’s Studies Research Centre, the University of Hong Kong

Saturday 28 November 1998

- Dr. Carmel Shalev highlighted the time constraint when the UN Committee on CEDAW meets with NGOs, and recommended NGO reports be compiled into one document with an executive summary sheet up front.

- Dr. Fanny Cheung highlighted that the EOC is an NGO, which does not have the mandate to monitor and implement CEDAW, and recommended a central mechanism, within the Government, which will serve as a machinery for the advancement of women. Many of the conference participants also see the need for a high-level focal point. They reported that often they are referred from one government department to the next in seeking assistance and cooperation from the Administration.

- The EOC is also recommending more governmental funding for NGOs who are currently providing valuable services to women in the community.

- Ms. Tessa Stewart and Ms. Catrina Lam of the Federation of Women’s Centers reported the grossly inadequate medical services for women and the medical profession’s insensitivity to women’s needs and emotions. They recommended a women’s health unit in the Health Department.

- Sister Ann Gray of Action for REACH OUT reported that although prostitution itself is not unlawful in Hong Kong, the police regularly harass prostitutes and try to entrap them. She recommended that the offence of soliciting be reformed, as this is often misused by the police to entrap women. It was also noted that many women come to Hong Kong because they have been promised jobs as entertainers or domestic helpers, but are subsequently forced to work in brothels. Official policies and attitudes towards such women need to be changed.
Ms. Fok Tin-man of SOCO reported the harsh lives of old-age women in the HKSAR, and recommended an old age pension scheme that would grant protection to citizens over 65.

Dr. Grace Mak of the Chinese University of Hong Kong pointed out that although there is no blatant sex discrimination against girls/women in schools/universities, female students face subtle discriminatory forces; such as dress code. She recommended that the teaching profession be sensitized to women’s issues.

Ms. Connie Bragas-Regalado of United Filipinas in Hong Kong reported that foreign domestic helpers are subjected to daily discrimination and abuse. She recommended race discrimination legislation and scrutinization of the Two-Week Rule.

Ms. Lam Ying-hing of the Women Workers’ Association recommended a two-prong approach to assist women in employment. On the legal front, women workers need protection from minimum-wage and age discrimination laws. The also need training programs and quality child care facilities.

Ms. Edith Cheung of Harmony, Dr. Philip Beh of the University of Hong Kong, Ms. Pricilla Lui of Against Child Abuse and Ms. Phyllis Wong of the Association Concerning Sexual Violence against Women reported the gross misrepresentation of the HKSAR Government’s Initial Report on CEDAW on the issues of violence against girls/women, to the extent that there is no mention of ‘rape’ in it. They all emphasized the need to educate the medical and legal professions, the Police, the Health Department, the Department of Justice, the Education Department, and the society at large about the social reality of rape, and about the adverse psychological and traumatic effects on the victims and women in general.

Conference Rapporteurs:

Catherine W. Ng, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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