

Vietnam's Center for Women and Public Policy

Dr. Bong-Scuk Sohn, Director of the Center for Korean Women and Politics visited Hanoi in early 1994 at the invitation of the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU). Her trip was part of the activities of the Asia-Pacific Women in Politics Network. One of its aims was to assist the VWU to establish the Center for Women and Public Policy, as part of a planned Center for Women and Politics.

The Vietnam Women's Union

Dr Sohn reports that the VWU, the only women's organization in Vietnam, boasts 11.00 million members, every five years it holds a National Women's Congress. According to Decision Number 163, the VWU is responsible for recommending women ministers, congresswomen, women officials in political parties and women public officials. It has a central headquarters and three administrative sections, that is, Province, District-Quarter and Commune-Ward, and, ten departments such as the Research Department, the International Cooperation Department etc. The Union's executive committee is the Presidium with fifteen members, nine from the central section and six from the local communities.

Women in politics

In terms of women's participation in politics, the Vice President of Vietnam is a woman and among sixteen ministers, four are women, including the Minister for Education. There are 73 women, or 18%, out of a total of 395 representatives in the national congress, they have a five year term, and women make up about 30 percent of representatives in local assemblies. Potential congresswomen are recommended to the National

Fatherland Front (NFF) by the Personnel Office of the VWU. The NFF takes charge of nominating candidates for the congress nationwide and a candidate then has to be elected by popular vote in local electorates, individuals can also run for election.

Center for Women and Public Policy: women's leadership education

The VWU has a great interest in strengthening women's leadership, in technical training for women and achieving equality between women and men. Thus the VWU will place the Center for Women and Public Policy under its Personnel Department which will lead to the establishment of a Center for Women and Politics to take charge of women's leadership education.

Leadership training is especially important for the 18% of women in the national legislature and the 30% in the local assemblies as most are not professional politicians but functional representatives, therefore they lack knowledge in managing political organizations or participating in the policy decision-making process.

In the short-term, the VWU is considering offering a program called 'Leadership Training Lecture Series' once a week or once a month, and holding workshops to build leadership and get ideas on how to train women leaders. In the longterm, the Center for Women and Public Policy will eventually become the main training center for women leaders. Through this process, they can exchange ideas and experiences with other centers, such as the Center for Korean Women and Politics.

legislation which benefits women and other disadvantaged groups. Obviously, women cannot depend on most men to put forward issues like reproductive rights, child care, sexual harassment, violence against women, etc. Moreover, it is all the more difficult to expect men to bring in women's perspectives in addressing issues such as economics, justice, peace, military, trade etc.

In many countries, there is a growing lack of respect for traditional politicians so the entry of women into politics in considerable numbers may improve politics. This assumption is substantiated by a survey conducted in Australia in 1991 where sixty-four percent of respondents believed that men enter politics for reasons of personal ambitions and desire for money and only eleven percent believed women had the same motives; and, only thirteen percent believed men were motivated by altruism and concern for community welfare while fifty-four percent believed women were motivated by altruistic concerns.

Therein lies the rationale of transformed and transformational politics. Women's direct involvement in politics is a change that has long been welcomed and anticipated. Moreover, participation is a learning experience which can improve the quality of work of both women and men, especially in fields which are traditionally unfamiliar to them. Balanced participation by women and men in decision-making through more women gaining positions of public power, will bring about a new logic, a new epistemology and a new way of being in the new world order.

Regardless of the approaches or paths women take to get into positions of public power, in aiming to become part of the partisan political mainstream many also want to influence and change it.

Sources: Center for Korean Women and Politics Newsletter, Oksan Bldg. No.402, 157-33 Samsung dong, Kangnam-ku, Seoul Korca 135-090, tel: 82-2-528-1201-3, fax: 82-2-528-1204; Shirkat Gah, Newsheet, p.29, Vol VI, No. 2, 1994.

References: Santiago, Irene; Soin, Kanwaljit, speeches delivered during the First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics, Manila, Philippines, 21-23 June, 1994.