April 2010

Dear Steering Committee Members:

I am delighted to share some new developments with you. Recently, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) officials inaugurated the Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), to complement the human rights body established in 2009.

Under the terms of reference of the establishment of the commission, the ACWC comprises representatives from the 10 member states of the ASEAN.

Each state is represented by two commissioners, one for women’s rights and the other for children’s rights, who serve three-year terms and may be consecutively reappointed for an additional term.

Our Steering committee member, Rita Kalibonso of Indonesia has been named Indonesia’s Commissioner for Women’s Rights. She is the well known women’s rights advocate and head of Mitra Perempuan.

I was first introduced to Rita in 2004 by the Ford Foundation. I was impressed with her seminal work on the drafting of the domestic violence law and the Health Law in Indonesia. Later, I invited her to join the Asia Cause Lawyer Network that I helped facilitate in India with the Lawyers Collective.

Please join me in congratulating a member of our network who has been recognized for her leadership role on women’s rights in Indonesia.

One of the goals behind our network is to advance women’s political, public and community participation. we can only do this if we identify the barriers to women’s political participation and set about dismantling them. Anna-Kaisa Ikonen, the Deputy Mayor of the City of Tampere, Finland and a Vice President of the World YWCA outlines strategies to overcome barriers to women’s political participation.

She identifies women’s dual responsibilities at home and work and women’s disproportionate care giving roles as a barrier to political participation. She argues that is also important that society supports women by offering childcare—whether organized by the state, municipality, or NGOs. This is one of the most important steps in ensuring that women have equal opportunity to participate in public life.
In a different part of the world, the spotlight is now on Kyrgyzstna, where the former foreign minister, Roza Otunbayeva, a woman, is the interim leader of the People’s Government. Interestingly, in an interview with AWID, Dr. Nurgul Djanaeva, President of the Forum of Women’s NGOs of Kyrgyzstan and author of Kyrgyzstan Women in Transition, discussed how women are playing important roles in but facing persistent challenges. One of the major challenges women face she argues is men’s failure to share the tasks associated with the organization of the household and care and raising of children. These attitudes confine women to the private sphere and exclude them from active participation in public life.

My own recent research has focused on reformist initiatives in work place policies that place equal care giving at the heart of equality in the work place. These new policies strive to advance work family reconciliation policies for both men and women so as to equalize care giving opportunities. Equality in the private sphere has a direct correlation with equality in the workplace. I hope to share this new research with you next month. I encourage you to do the same with your research.

Finally, I have been busy writing the introduction to your papers and the compendium will hopefully be ready for publication by the summer. I would also like to conduct a very brief interview with each of you and put them up on our web page. I am attaching the brief questionnaire to this e-news letter that I would like each one of you to answer. If there is a question you would rather not answer, please feel free to leave it blank.

I look forward to your individual responses.

Best regards,

Rangita

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