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النساء في الصين

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WOMEN IN CHINA

As you all know, thirty-five years ago, China was a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. In those days, the nation and people suffered cruel exploitation and oppression under imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism, and the women, in particular, were subjected not only to the feudal rule of political, clan and religious authorities but also to the dictation of husbands. They were at the bottom of the social ladder, and were virtually house slaves, with no rights to speak of. Rebellious against this fate, the Chinese women joined the people of the whole country and fought long and hard against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism for independence and national liberation. Victory was won in 1949, and the People's Republic of China was proclaimed. A new day dawned for Chinese women, who became masters of their country along with the men. The People's Republic eradicated once for all the roots of political and economic inequality between men and women and abolished all discriminatory legislations, thus creating the necessary social conditions for genuine sexual equality.

The very first law passed in the People's Republic after its establishment was the Marriage Law. This liberated Chinese women from the feudal marriage system, which had enslaved them for thousands of years.

Since 1954, each of the four revisions of China's Constitution has made clearer and more specific the principle of equality between men and women in all spheres of social endeavor, thereby perfecting legislation for the protection

of women's rights and interests.

The Chinese Constitution stipulates that women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural and social, including family life. It declares state protection for marriage, the family, the mother and child. Taking into account the specific problems relating to Chinese women, the Constitution expressly points out that women should be given equal opportunities in job training and appointment to official posts. Besides, it also stipulates that men and women enjoy equal pay for equal work, children have the responsibility to support their parents, and maltreatment of the elderly is prohibited. The principle of sexual equality stipulated by the Constitution is also embodied in other legislations, such as the Electoral Law, the Criminal Law and the Law of Criminal Procedure. The Chinese Government not only pays attention to the formulation of laws and decrees, but also tried hard to enforce them in everyday.

In the past 35 years, in the different periods of the nation's development, China has, in the light of the nation's overall tasks and the actual conditions of women, made persistent efforts to implement the principle of sexual equality through policies and programs. In order to help women apply related laws to effectively safeguard their own rights and interests, women's federations at the national, provincial, municipal and county levels have set up legal advisory services to give women free legal counselling. Lawyers are sent to defend their cases in court, if necessary. All this provides a fundamental guarantee for women to exercise their own rights to the fullest possible extent and play a role in the nation's social, economic and political life.

With the care of the state, the protection of the law, as well as their own active participation in development, they have scored considerable achievements, thereby greatly

enhanced their political status. In recent years, over 95% of China's women eligible to vote took part in direct elections of deputies to people's congresses at the county level. The National People's Congress (N.P.C.) is China's supreme organ of state power. The number of women deputies has increased from 147 or 11.9% of the total at the First N.P.C. held in 1954 to 632, or 21.2% at the Sixth N.P.C. held in 1983. Increasing numbers of women are occupying leading posts in organs of state power from the central down to the local levels. They are participating in decision making and management of state affairs. China now has 12 women ministers and vice-ministers in the various ministries under the State Council. There are a fair number of women who take up leading posts as governor, vice-governors, vice-mayors, chairmen and vice-chairmen of the standing committees of the people's congresses at the provincial, municipal and autonomous region levels. In judicial departments in China, there are 1,266 women lawyers, 5,622 women judges, among whom 1,596 are women court presidents, vice-presidents and presiding judges, 5.3 million women work in government bodies, institutions and enterprises, making up 27% of the total state functionaries.

The Chinese government has always held that it is the bound duty of every citizen to build China into a prosperous and strong country; that the modernization of China could not be realized without the participation of women who account for half of the population. Meanwhile, only by taking part in production, can women achieve economic independence. After New China was founded in 1949, a large number of women joined the labour force. The number of women workers and staff increased from 0.60 million in 1949 to 41.99 million in 1983, or 36.5% of the total. Their fields of employment have extended far beyond the traditional spheres. Today, women are working on all fronts of national reconstruction except for a few occupations that are unsuitable for women physiologically.

For example, women make up 30% of the total work force in petroleum industry, 23.6% in architecture and resource survey, 22.9% in transportation, postal and telecommunications services, and 36.1% in forestry, water conservancy and meteorology. In the newly emerging electronic industry, the number of women workers and staff constitutes about 40% of the total. 31.8% scientific and technical workers are women. The ratio of senior women professionals has increased from 7% in 1978 to 10.5% to date. As masters of the state, Chinese women have made notable contributions to increasing economic returns in production, and many of them have become the mainstay in production and technical innovation or outstanding business executives.

In the current reform widely carried out in China, the women are taking an active and important part. Many of them are not only down-to-earth doers, but also go about their business with considerable wisdom and ability. They are way ahead of others and admired by the public. For example, the Haiyan Shirt Factory in Zhejiang Province used to be a small sewing cooperative with an annual profit of only 5,000 yuan. Women workers make up 65% of its labour force. Managerial reforms brought a number of young women to leading posts at different levels. At present, 19 out of the 34 workshop directors, deputy-directors, division-chiefs and deputy division-chiefs are women. After five years of hard work, the factory has become the biggest and most successful shirt factory in the whole province.

The 150 million women in the countryside, or half of the rural labour force, play a significant role in agriculture. Over the past few years, great changes have taken place in the countryside with the implementation of the household-based responsibility system in production. The rural economy is developing into a commercialized, specialized and diversified economy, facilitating women in the rural areas to fully develop

their skills. For instance, more than 20,000 households specialized in chicken-raising in the suburbs of 12 cities in Heilongjiang province are operated mainly by women. And 85% of eggs sold in the markets of Qiqihaer city are supplied by 11,000 specialized households mainly run by women. Many women are also engaged in the sideline occupations, such as stitch-work, embroidery, drawn-thread work, bamboo and willow weaving. As women create more and more wealth for society through agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery and various sideline occupations in a diversified economy, they increase their family income and raise their status in the family at the same time. The responsibility system has resulted, as never before, the full implementation of the legal guarantees regarding "Equal pay for equal work" and the principle "to each according to his or her work" in distribution.

As is well known, China has one of the oldest civilizations in the world. However, during the century before the Chinese people gained national liberation in 1949, China was reduced to a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country with backward culture and technology. In old China, labouring women had no access to education. More than 80% of the Chinese population were illiterate, and most of them were women. After liberation in 1949, educational reform was carried out as one of the most urgent tasks of the People's Government. The Constitution ensures women equal rights and opportunities to education. The age-old concept that women had no need for learning has radically changed.

At present, 95% of school-age children are in schools. 43.7% of in-school children are girls. In middle schools, girls make up 39.5% of the total, and in institutions of higher learning, 26.9%.

In 1978, the Chinese Government called on the nation to raise its cultural, scientific and technological level so as to meet the needs of the four modernizations.

Women's participation in the drive for modernization necessitates professional qualifications and proficiency. Towards this end, the Government has not only expanded regular school education, but also established for working adults large numbers of college level spare-time schools such as TV, correspondence and evening schools. In addition, factories, mines and other enterprises as well as organizations and institutions have opened their own schools or on-job training programs for their employees with no sex discrimination. By 1985, every worker or employee in the country will have participated in one or more of these programs.

Vocational education is developing fast in China's cities and countryside. Millions of women are studying hard to acquire more technical knowledge and skills to keep up with the modernization drive. Now, young women throughout the country attend various vocational schools to study textiles, printing and dyeing, electronics, law, cooking, tourism, service trades, foreign trade, pedagogy, nursing, agro-technology, industrial arts and hundreds of other subjects. Some cities, such as Dalian, boast of a girls' vocational school. Since the students in these schools have specific goals in mind, they take their studies very seriously and are enthusiastic about their new job prospects. For example, the young women in the Beijing Vocational School of Law are looking forward to becoming impartial and selfless judges one day. Thanks to the new training programs, they have improved their work capabilities and are playing an increasingly important role in economy and society in general. The number of women teachers is increasing. In 1983, women teachers in middle schools made up 26.1% of the total, in universities and colleges, 25%, and in elementary schools, 37%.

With women's wide participation in all spheres of national construction, the country has expanded social welfare services to provide child care and lighten the housework of working

parents. Large numbers of nurseries and kindergartens have been set up by large and middle-sized factories, enterprises, government institutions, as well as by urban neighbourhood communities. In China, one-fourth of the preschool-age children are in the nurseries and kindergartens.

China has a population of 1.03 billion and two-thirds of them are women and children. To provide proper maternity and child health care becomes an important factor in improving the health of the Chinese people. In old China, maternity and child health services were few and facilities were poor and backward. In 1949, the year of liberation, China had only 80 hospitals or health centers for women and children with altogether 1,762 beds, 5 children's hospitals with 139 beds, and 9 maternity and child health care clinics with no beds at all. As such, it was difficult for women and children to obtain proper medical treatment. Infant mortality and gynaecological disease morbidity were high.

After liberation, intensive efforts have been made by the government to provide MCH services. Stipulations to protect women and children and advance their welfare have been written into the Constitution, the Marriage Law, the National Programme for Agricultural Development and the Labour Insurance Regulations. Thousands of maternity and child care workers have been trained by various health organizations. The development of China's economy is another factor that has brought about progress in the field of public health. In 1983, there were 196,000 health institutions all over the country. Among them, 202 are maternity and child care hospitals or lying-in hospitals with a total of 18,000 beds, 25 children's hospitals with 6,000 beds, and 2,649 local maternity and child health care centers. Besides, nearly all the general hospitals have obstetrics and gynecology departments as well as paediatrics departments. With the improvement in women's and children's health, infant mortality declined sharply from 200‰ before 1949 to 34.68‰ in 1981, and mortality of pregnant and lying-in mothers from 15‰ in pre-liberation days to 0.5‰ in 1981.

The Chinese government's policy on public health puts prevention and health care first, and stresses giving guidance to medical units at the grassroots. The principle is to combine prevention with treatment. Three-tier MCH networks have been set up to implement the policy. The three tiers consist of the city, district and neighbourhood community levels in the urban areas, while in the countryside, the structure ramifies from county into its townships and villages. Hospitals, health centers and health stations at the corresponding levels combine to provide comprehensive care for mothers and children. The networks are mainly concerned with the promotion of hospitalized parturition, pre-and post-natal general screening and treatment of gynaecological diseases, popularization of midwifery in the rural areas, labour protection for women in industry and agriculture, improvement of their working conditions, and so on. Particular stress is put on popularizing knowledge of maternity and child health care and training professional workers in this field, of whom 58.9% are women.

China's governmental and non-governmental organizations have made great efforts to control population and have achieved notable results. To protect the interests of women and children, the All-China Women's Federation, a national mass organization, takes family planning as one of its most important tasks and has done a lot of publicity work among women in coordination with the government departments concerned. Staff members and activists of women's federations channel their educational and publicity efforts in four directions. Firstly, to explain the government's policies on family planning until every household clearly understands the population policy in the context of national interest and sees what family planning can contribute to the emancipation of women and the health of mothers and children. Secondly, to explain the policy thoroughly to those who have misgivings about family planning. Thirdly, to deliver contraceptives provided by the government free of charge to married couples. Cooperating with the government

departments concerned, the staff members of women's federations introduce contraceptive methods to those couples who are willing to practice and make sure that they understand the functions of contraceptives and know how to use them. Fourthly, to give special care to those women who have particular problems with birth control and help them solve their real difficulties.

Since the policy of family planning proceeds from the actual situation in China and serves the interests of the nation and people, it is understood and supported by the Chinese people, including the women. The majority of married couples at child-bearing age voluntarily respond to the government's call and adopt different suitable measures for birth control. But influenced by remnant feudal ideas such as "man is superior to women", "only sons could support the aged parents", "more sons means more happiness", some people could not clearly understand the need for family planning, especially in some rural areas where the work is hindered by outmoded concepts. The full implementation of family planning remains an arduous task in China. The society at large and various organizations will continue to work together and carry out active publicity and educational work to raise step by step public consciousness of the importance of practicing family planning.

With the increasingly significant role played by the Chinese women in national life, a large number of model working women of China's various nationalities and from all walks of life have emerged. In 1979, 104 national women model workers were cited by the State Council, amounting to 18% of the total. 30,000 "March 8th Red Banner Pace-Setters", both individual and collective, were commended at the national level in 1960, 1979 and 1983. On March 8th, 1985, 150 capable women in economic reforms in urban and rural areas were cited by the All-China Women's Federation. The achievements made by the Chinese women in various fields have demonstrated that women constitute an important and indispensable force in the drive to achieve

socialist modernization. The new mental outlook of women and their initiative to master new techniques in national construction have won the respect and confidence of the people, and as a result, women's political, economic and social status has enhanced.

Although in the past 35 years, the Chinese women have made significant contributions and greatly improved their status, they still have problems. A lot remains to be done. Traces of male superiority and discrimination against women, for instance, are still in evidence. The educational and technological level of Chinese women as a whole is not high. Not enough women are occupying high posts in government or participating in decision-making. Social services are much short of the demand. These are problems on our road of advance which we will no doubt overcome eventually.

The All-China Women's Federation, aimed at safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, is a nation-wide women's organization. It represents the female population of all nationalities in all walks of life such as women workers, peasants, and intellectuals. The All-China Women's Federation and its branches are playing an important role in motivating, organizing and educating Chinese women to participate in the political and economic development of the country, and in developing social welfare.

The Federation and its branches (set up at each administrative level including the provincial, municipal, autonomous region and county levels) voice the wishes and demands of the women at large through the women deputies to the National People's Congress and to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The organization actively participates in the formulation of state legislation and government policies and programmes and in the implementation of these laws and programmes nationwide.

At present, the priorities in the work of women's federation at all levels are: to motivate the women to display to the full their initiative and creativity so that they could contribute more to building the socialist material and spiritual civilization of the nation, to provide better care to children, to better implement the Constitution and laws and decrees relating to equal rights between men and women, to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of women and children, and to push the women's movement forward.

The women of China are doing just that. With support and encouragement from the Party and Government, they are working in a spirit of self-respect and self-confidence, striving for self-improvement, resolutely safeguarding their sacred rights and interests, and dedicating themselves to the cause of modernization.

It has always been the ardent wish of the women of China and the All-China Women's Federation to strengthen friendly ties with the women and women's organizations of the world. We are much concerned with the development of the women's movement everywhere and are gratified to see that these movements are making progress, and that the women's position worldwide continues to improve through to varying extents. Positive results have been achieved in equality for women, particularly in the past decade since the United Nations proclaimed a Decade for Women.

China attaches great importance to the forthcoming 1985 world conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. A national preparatory committee for the Conference was set up on June 15 last year comprised of members from various government departments and people's organizations. These include the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, the Ministries of Health, Education, Labour and Personnel, and Culture, the New China News Agency, the Ministry of Posts and Tele-Communications, the Ministry of Broadcasting and Television, The All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China and the All-China Women's Federation. Mme. Kang Keqing, President of the Federation, is the Director of the preparatory committee. The Federation has been entrusted by the Government to take charge of all preparations and activities for the Decade of Women and its 1985 World Conference.

We Chinese women have always held that the women of all countries are closely related and mutually supportive in their common fight to safeguard the rights and interests of women and to defend world peace. It is our strong desire to strengthen the cooperation and ties with the friends and sisters from Asia and Pacific Region as well as from the whole world.