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Written statement* submitted by Hong Kong Federation of Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 June 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Safeguarding Women's Rights and Interests in Hong Kong, China

A. Hong Kong Federation of Women

Hong Kong Federation of Women (HKFW) is a non-profit and non-political organisation with Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Established in 1993, Hong Kong Federation of Women is dedicated to the advancement of women's rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of women in Hong Kong, China. With a strong membership base of over 100,000 individuals and 87 corporate members from various sectors, including business, professionals, workers, and homemakers, Hong Kong Federation of Women plays a pivotal role in advocating for policies and initiatives that promote the well-being and development and advancement of women in Hong Kong, China.

Hong Kong Federation of Women works closely with government bodies, NGOs, and international organisations to actively promote women's rights through various initiatives, including public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, organising cultural exchange and inclusivity events and activities, such as launching the first international exchange platform, Women Power Forum, and attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

B. Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Hong Kong, China

B1. Legal Protection and Government Initiatives

At the end of 2023, women constituted 54% of Hong Kong's (China) population of 7.5 million. Hong Kong, China, has consistently prioritised women's rights and interests, demonstrating a strong commitment to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with its own legislative and administrative measures to safeguard the rights of women under CEDAW, including the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance.

The foundation for these legislative and administrative measures to protect women's rights and interests in Hong Kong, China, is enshrined in the Basic Law since 1997 under the "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS), which ensures equality before the law for all Hong Kong, China, residents (Article 25), guarantees rights to vote and stand for election (Article 26), and protects freedoms of speech, the press, assembly, procession, and the right to join and form trade unions, and to strike (Article 27).

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (NSL), passed in 2020, and the Safeguarding National Security Bill under Article 23 of the Basic Law commenced on International Women's Day this year provides for stability and security. Article 4 of the NSL stipulates that human rights and freedoms shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security, ensuring that rights and freedoms under CEDAW are fully protected, and thus reinforcing the protection of women's rights and interests.

The Hong Kong, China, Government is working fervently on addressing difficulties and challenges in gender discrimination and building a family-friendly society, and launching new initiatives, such as Family and Women Development Summit, one-stop family and women information portal, Funding Scheme on the Promotion of Family Education. The recent establishment of a Women Affairs Team and the designation of a Commissioner for Women Affairs underscore the Hong Kong, China, Government's devotion to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in political and public life.

B2. Development and Statistics

Since 2019, according to the latest statistics:

- **Political participation and representation:** After the electoral changes in Hong Kong, China, in 2021, with an increase of female candidates from 16% in 1999 to 28% in 2023. Whilst remaining a minority, female members in the three Councils (District, Legislative, Executive) increased slightly to 29%, 18%, and 22% respectively from 18%, 16%, and 19% from prior to NSL.
- **Advisory and statutory bodies:** The proportion of female non-official members in Hong Kong, China, advisory and statutory bodies rose from 33.2% in 2018 to 35.4% in 2023, which is largely attributable to the introduction of a gender benchmark target at 25% for females in 2004, and later raised to 30% in 2010 and further to 35% in 2015.
- **Civil servants:** Although the share of female civil servants stayed consistent at around 38.5% for the period from 2019 to 2023, there was an increase from 38.4% in 2019 to 41.1% in 2023 at the directorate level.
- **Labour force:** Despite various measures launched by the Hong Kong, China, Government in the recent years, including extending statutory maternity and paternity leave, participation rate of women decreased slightly from 50.6% to 47.7%. The proportion women engaged in managerial and professional occupations increased from 41.7% (2019) to 42.9% (2023), which is less than our male counterparts at 46.8% in 2023. Similarly, despite the apparent increase in the overall median monthly employment earnings of local female workers from HK\$16,200 (2019) to HK\$19,200 (2023), that is considerably lower (16%) than of HK\$22,800 for men.
- **Listed companies:** The share of women sitting on the board of directors rose from 14.6% in 2020 to 17.4% in 2023, and the number of listed companies without female directors fell from 31.5% in 2020 to 19.4% in 2023. This is largely due to the revision of the listing rules in January 2022 to prohibit single-gender boards, which listed companies must comply with by the end of this year.

B3. Recommendations

Whilst there have been continuous improvements in Hong Kong, China, for women's rights and interests, Hong Kong Federation of Women offers the following recommendations to further advance gender equality in Hong Kong, China,:

1. **Enhance legal protections:** Strengthen laws and enforcement to combat discrimination and violence against women, and to ensure that legal provisions are effectively implemented and accessible to all women.
2. **Promote women's leadership:** Implement targeted measures to increase women's representation in political, economic, and social leadership roles.
3. **Address the gender pay gap:** Develop policies and programs aimed at closing the gender pay gap, including transparent pay practices and incentives for equal pay.
4. **Support work-life balance:** Introduce policies that support a healthy work-life balance for women.
5. **Challenge gender stereotypes:** Launch public education campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in society.
6. **Combat violence against women:** Strengthen support services for survivors of violence and implement preventive measures to address violence against women.
7. **Increase women's participation in public and political life:** Encourage and support women's participation in public life through capacity-building programs, mentorship, and networking opportunities.
8. **Ensure access to quality education:** Continue to ensure equal access to quality education for girls and promote programs that empower women through education.

9. Promote health and well-being: Enhance programs and services that focus on women's health and well-being, including mental health support and reproductive health services.
10. Engage men and boys: Involve men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful gender norms.
11. Conduct research and analysis: Collect data and conduct research, examination, and analysis to understand which areas could be improved and how.
12. Building and promoting cultural exchanges: Foster regional cultural integration and enhance cultural confidence of young participants in understanding and paying attention to “Family, Family Education, and Family Tradition”, so that good family traditions are inherited and passed forward to create a beautiful and harmonious society.

C. Conclusion

Hong Kong Federation of Women observes that China is likewise continuously strengthening her dedication to protecting and improving women's rights and interests, to promoting equality between men and women, and looks forward to the progression of women's rights and interests in China with the most recent amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women (LPRIW) taking effect in 2023 and women's interests being represented and upheld by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and the local women's federations at all levels in China (Article 6 of the LPRIW).

Under the OCTS, Hong Kong, China, has provided a system to protect and promote the rights and interests of women in Hong Kong, China, which are distinct and freestanding from the laws and policies of China. Notably, LPRIW and other laws of China do not apply in Hong Kong, China, nor do they influence the legal protections currently in place in Hong Kong, China, and vice versa. Similarly, Hong Kong Federation of Women is neither associated to nor subject to ACWF, and is also not a “local women's federation in China”.

In complete contrast with the biased, misguided, and misinformed news reports and remarks about Hong Kong, China, which have continued without any basis, the reality is that both China and Hong Kong, China, strives to uphold the OCTS and the rule of law.

Hong Kong Federation of Women is committed to working with China, the Hong Kong, China, Government, the ACWF, the civil society, and the international community to address the challenges and build on the achievements in advancing women's rights and interests, and gender equality in Hong Kong, China. Hong Kong Federation of Women believes that the universal periodic review process is a valuable opportunity to reflect on progress, identify areas for improvement, and collaboratively work towards a more equitable society.
