

18th ACWO BIENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONFERENCE

Acceptance Speech

Dr June Goh, President of SCWO

Mingalar Thiri Hotel Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 27th – 29th Nov2018

Her Excellency Dr Thet Thet Zin, President of ACWO

Distinguished ACWO Board Members

Delegates from ASEAN Member States

Organisers and supporters

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening to all.

I am most gratified to be here at the ceremony where I witness everyone coming together, all dressed up in their national attires with pride. The spectacular colors and uplifting spirits will be a few things I will remember when I return to Singapore tomorrow. Not to mention, I am pleased to see familiar faces, and so many new friends at this evening's 18th ACWO Biennial General Assembly.

Opening and Acceptance Speech

Let me start first by saying a special thank you to Dr Zin and your team, as well as Dr Husna our ACWO secretariat, for the impeccable arrangement and organization of the entire event. Allow me to also extend my appreciation to Dr Zin for her valuable contributions as the President of ACWO for 2016-2018. During her time in office, we have witnessed several milestones.

2. I am deeply honoured and humbled to be representing the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations (SCWO) to be the incoming president of ACWO come 2019. I am humbled and privileged to serve ACWO—working alongside with many passionate women in various women's organisations

from across the ASEAN region who do such important work. I believe this is truly what makes this honor so meaningful to me.

3. The theme of this year's General Assembly "Leaving No One Behind: Empowering Rural Women in ASEAN and Enhancing Quality of Family Life" is something close to my heart. While Singapore does not have a substantial number of rural women, there is still a small population of women who are afflicted by circumstances of many kinds- poverty, lack of education and healthcare, restrained mobility and subjection to domestic violence like our residents at Star Shelter, a facility by SCWO.

4. As a woman and as a representative from the SCWO, Women Empowerment is not only a personal conviction but also a national imperative in which the public, private and people sectors in each of our countries should commit in full swing to. Every woman and girl must be able to pursue goals and fulfill aspirations and for them to do so, the societies they are living in must support the development of their capacity to get access to resources, opportunities, decision-making rights and to contribute in all aspects of life.

5. As the umbrella national council for women in each of our country, we play a pivotal role in advocating for our women from all segments of the society. Here at ACWO, there is certainly no better platform than us- in unison- to leverage on each other's strengths to improve the quality of lives of women, advance their economic resilience and empower them to realize their potential. We cannot promise to save them all, but we must always give our best shot in leaving no one behind.

Importance of ACWO to ASEAN and Singapore

5. ASEAN is diverse. We communicate in different languages and celebrate different cultures and customs. Despite our differences, ASEAN countries have continued to uphold a sense of regional identity and solidarity. Our sense of solidarity also sees us going forward promptly to effectively render support to each other whenever crisis happened. In the last 50 years, our respective governments and people of ASEAN have developed ties that honour mutual respect, co-operation and consultative dialogues. We must never take these ties for granted, more so in this age of globalization, where issues and challenges can have impacts on a transnational level and cannot be solved by a single state. In the same vein, with strong collaboration, ASEAN can also facilitate positive developments in a more effective, collaborative and much quicker way.

6. I am proud to say that based on the Global Gender Gap Report 2017, 7 out of 10 ASEAN countries, including Singapore, swept more than half of Asia's top 10 most gender equal countries. This starkly reveals that ASEAN has made a combined improvement in this aspect and we really ought to celebrate this substantial progress that is happening in our region. Yet, despite significant increases in agency and in access to economic opportunities for many women, the cycle of inequality is not lifted for everybody- In ASEAN, there are women who still have fewer opportunities for economic participation than men, higher health and safety risks, less access to basic and higher education, and less political and leadership representation. It is on a critical note that those often left behind are women for whom their existing constraints are most binding.

7. This is exactly why ACWO plays a crucial role in advocating gender equality that is an intertwined and cross-cutting issue in the ASEAN region. When women and girls are given equal opportunities to reach their fullest potential, it does not only attain the goal of gender equality but also a wider range of international development goals. With empowered women and girls, they can contribute to the health and productivity of families and communities, creating sustainable ripple effects which are beneficial for everyone and the country. As a regional organization, we can gather more understanding on the ground; encourage one another to carry out structural reforms; pre-empt future trends and implications; learn from each other's best practices so that we may scale effective implementations to our own homes. There will always be differences, but with much effort and time, we will continuously find a common ground and platform to rectify the imbalance and catalyze meaningful changes.

Proposed Plans of SCWO

8. In line with this objective, SCWO, which is the national coordinating body of over 50 female organisations and represents more than 500,000 women, serves to unite all of them to work towards the ideals of 'Equal Space, Equal Voice and Equal Worth' for women in Singapore. We are represented on various government and inter-ministry committees, as well as regional and international bodies where we contribute views in the gender equality. Women empowerment and resilient families definitely sit at our heart and our members' causes. Harnessing the power of the resources and networks from all our members, we aim to not only make incremental moves but a quantum leap forward in making influences through policy-revision and ground-up initiatives.

9. With our incoming presidency in 2019, we will spearhead to bring together all 10 women's national councils in the ASEAN region to work in concerted efforts towards the full integration of women in development and the enhancement of women's participation in both national and regional progress. Your participation for this quest is valuable and influential!

Concluding remarks

13. In closing, I cannot emphasize any more that each and every one in ACWO therefore carries an important responsibility. ASEAN must keep on moving! Let me borrow the words of the former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama: "No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens." So let's keep going until every woman and girl across ASEAN has the opportunity she deserves to have. For the supportive men in this house, I urge you to continue to lend your support and believe the cause to leave no woman behind. Let us all continue to be a vehicle of influence in our communities, workplaces and countries.

14. Finally, it's my pleasure to be here today, I wish us all a very enjoyable evening. Moving forward to our new term in office, I assure you of the full support of myself and the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations.

Thank you.