

SPEECH BY 19TH ACWO PRESIDENT

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19TH ACWO BIENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SINGAPORE 20 NOV 2020

Distinguished ACWO Board Members

Delegates from ASEAN Member States

Friends from the ASEAN Secretariat

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon,

In the history of ACWO, this is a handover like no other.

I distinctly remember on November 2018 we met at the 18th ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations Biennial General Assembly at Naypyidaw, Myanmar where I took up this crucial responsibility of the 19th ACWO Presidency, receiving the baton from the outgoing president, Dr Thet Thet Zin of Myanmar. The splendid event organized by the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation was full of hugs, song and dance. We had the privilege of travelling to each other's country and experiencing the culture and warmth of ASEAN hospitality.

In this short space of 2 years, the world is in the grip of a global pandemic. Our countries in ASEAN are also suffering the effects of the devastating disease and various stages of lockdowns. Borders are closed and I regret that we are unable to offer the same wonderful reception and elaborate ceremony we received from our ASEAN sisters. I am grateful for the memories when we hosted you last March at the international women's day formal gala dinner in Singapore. Could anyone of you imagine that the 19th ACWO Biennial General Assembly and Handover Ceremony of the ACWO presidency would now be virtual.

Despite this situation, ACWO and our ASEAN women have shown admirable resilience and tenacity. We have carried on with board meetings productively, with full attendance and enthusiastic participation. Achievements have been made as you will see in the report I am presenting now.

ACWO Activities (2019 - 2020)

We had the pleasure of hosting the ACWO Board of Directors Members and ASEAN delegates in Singapore on 22 March 2019 for our 1st Board Meeting. We had much inspiring and fruitful ideas thereby setting the direction for this term.

ACWO attended the Open Session of the 18th ASEAN Committee of Women (ACW) Meeting in Brunei Darussalam on 11 October 2019. I represented ACWO at the meeting and presented the ACWO 2025 Vision Statement, emphasising the importance of ACWO working together with ACW for the shared advancement of women in ASEAN.

Thereafter, in Bangkok/Nonthaburi, Thailand on 3 November 2019, in The Chairman's Statement Of The 35th ASEAN Summit: Advancing Partnership For Sustainability, he said:

We support the vision of the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO) to leverage on its network to bridge the advantages of smart technologies for women, to enhance the quality of women's lives in ageing and to empower women in the economy.

This is a huge milestone for ACWO as our efforts in women empowerment and advancements are being recognised. For this achievement, would like to specially thank the ASEAN Secretariat, and the Ministry of Social and Family Development for your support. It has provided us with much visibility on the digital platform and endorsement in our work. We must continue this momentum to strengthen our position in working for the women in our communities.

Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic happened and caused severe disruption in the way we live and work, we had to quickly adapt to the new normal. Despite such challenges, we did not reduce our efforts to engage the ACWO Members and quickly turned to having our events virtually. We hosted the first virtual ACWO Board of Directors meeting on 11th August this year. I was heartened to see everyone safe and still good spirits.

We organised the inaugural ACWO Masterclass 2020 on 16 and 17 September 2020 based on the ACWO Vision 2025 Statement. It reflected ACWO's determination and commitment to work in concerted effort to provide an enabling and inclusive environment for women across ASEAN.

There were 3 topics covered in the Masterclass. Firstly, Advancing ASEAN Smart Nation Cities. Secondly, Enhancing Quality of Women's Lives in Ageing, and lastly, Women and Entrepreneurship. These topics were specifically chosen by the ACWO board as shared goals that ACWO strives to work towards.

The ACWO Masterclass was attended by more than 100 participants from 9 different ASEAN countries. It was an enriching experience where the national coordinating bodies for women from the 9 ASEAN countries, members of various ASEAN women organisations, and representatives from the public and private sector were able to come together to discuss and raise awareness on women's issues and to collaborate with each other to empower and advocate for women in ASEAN. The participants were engaged, full of enthusiasm and discussions were robust. Connections were made as well.

In this rapidly changing world, the use of technology necessitated by COVID has accelerated. We must keep up. Many in our countries especially the elderly and rural women risk being left behind. We must continue to be relevant to the women in ASEAN that we serve and leave no one behind.

I am very grateful to the ACWO board for your support and friendship during Singapore's term as ACWO president. Looked forward to our meetings as it represented a sisterhood binding our countries and women supporting women with common goals.

Thank you for also partnering with stakeholders to implement programmes in your respective countries to help those in need and ensuring that women across ASEAN are supported during this difficult time.

Dr Husna, always tireless and hard working. I want you to know that ACWO recognizes and appreciates all your selfless efforts.

I would also like to thank Dr Ananmah for always being there to remind us of the rich history of ACWO and helping with the procedure manual.

Thank you, Mr Richard Tan, for your advice and experience which was quite instrumental in the ACWO vision.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr Raymond Chow, Deputy High Commissioner of Singapore in Brunei Darussalam-for your presence and assistance in making this handover a memorable one.

Congratulations Brunei Darussalam for taking over the ACWO Presidency.

You have undertaken this huge responsibility in the most challenging of times. However, I see new opportunities as well. You will also have the full support of your ACWO sisters.