

Third Global Congress of Women in Politics and Governance
Gender in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

October 19-22, 2008

Dusit Thani Hotel, Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines

Welcome Message

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Ladies and Gentlemen, my dear colleagues and women leaders participating in this Third Global Congress of Women in Politics and Governance, it's a great pleasure for me to make this speech on behalf of CAPWIP, the hosting organization of this very meaningful event in the history of women in politics and governance. I welcome all of you and thank you for being here.

Your presence here today heartens us and makes all our efforts worthwhile to make this event successful for all of us. We hope we will all go back home secure in our commitment to do something, especially in the areas of policy and legislation, necessary to galvanize our peoples for action.

CAPWIP started with 13 members from nine (9) countries, Thailand, Pakistan, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Papua New Guinea, Australia, United States of America and the Philippines. Faced with no funding support to organize the first ever Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics, CAPWIP decided to GO FOR BROKE—by writing to 2,000 women across Asia-Pacific expressing the hope that if at least ten percent of these women will come to attend the planned congress, CAPWIP can begin its advocacy with their support.

Two hundred thirty seven (237) women from twenty three (23) countries came, most of them using their own funds. Thus, the First Asia Pacific Congress of Women in Politics was held in Manila, on June 21-23, 1994. The congress addressed the theme “Why Women? What politics?” raising four issues: What is politics? Why should women be involved in politics? What kind of politics do women want to be involved in? What should we do to develop this kind of politics and build women's participation?

The Congress endorsed CAPWIP and its role as a non-profit, non-stock organization dedicated to the promotion of Women in Public Power, Politics and Decision-making and affirmed CAPWIP's transformative perspective. After a decade of pushing, inspiring and challenging each other to run and occupy the seats of power, women have realized the

need to go beyond the game of numbers. To gain a place in the seats of power is only half of the struggle.

Societal transformation to a peaceful, just and gender-fair society with governance continues to be the aspiration of women and underpins the global efforts to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making.

But this vision requires practical actions that take into account the current realities of a rapidly-changing world that poses new threats, risk as well as opportunities. An understanding of these is vital in defining the path women should take to overcome risks and maximize the opportunities.

The Sixth Asia Pacific Congress of Women in Politics and Decision-Making was convened by CAPWIP on February 10-12, 2008 in Makati City.

Although there is a wide array of issues confronting women, four eminent concerns were taken up during the Congress, namely:

- Women's political participation in politics, leadership and decision-making
- Peace and security
- Environment
- Trade Liberalization

The last three themes have generally been considered as generic mainstream concerns but their gender implications have not been adequately explored and await women's active engagement in the discourse and practice. For example, women have observed that they bear the burdens of war and conflict yet they are rarely part of peace negotiations; women have long felt the need to understand the implications of disasters, attributable to climate change, in the lives of women and its connection to Integral Sustainable Development; women have generally been excluded from the discussions despite being the victims of climate change and consequent disaster. Ironically, women in many countries have the potential to be the most effective agents for restoring and protecting the environment.

Inevitably, women must understand and engage in mainstream issues and gender must be taken up as part and parcel of these mainstream issues as they being, the leaders, defined how women can become principal actors, as participants and beneficiaries in the analysis and formulation of the problems and their solutions. The ultimate goal remains to be: gender justice and gender equality.

We decided, a year ago, to undertake a global congress to understand the gender aspect of Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction. Climate change is now emerging as the area of greatest concern in the 21st century. Many people would agree that this problem has assumed crisis status.

As IPC, CNN and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “it appears that the scale and seriousness of climate change is at last being grasped.” We stand on the brink of a historic consensus, not only between scientists, but in the corridors of political power and in boardrooms across the globe.

Speaking after the publication of the report in February 2007, Achim Steiner, head of the UN Environment Program, said that “it marks the end-point of the debate” and that “the focus should now shift to policy”. “If we don’t” Steiner continued, “the world will be in even deeper trouble than it is today and the price of not acting will go up with every year that passes”.

The time is now for nations to make meaningful movement toward policies which confront climate change and reduce risks of disaster. This Global Congress will add the missing important ingredient in the debate: GENDER. Yes, women can contribute to transformative politics with perspective and leadership in Climate Change responses and disaster risk reduction.

I believe this Congress will provide a turning point in empowering women and mainstreaming gender in climate change responses and disaster risk reduction and look forward to very lively and fruitful discussions.

Thank you again for your being here.

LET’S BEGIN.