

**Remarks of
Mr. Yuxue Xue
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**Is Equality a Political Reality for Women?
National Seminar on Women in Politics
8 December 2011
Amari Watergate Hotel**

Your Excellency Mr. Santi Prompat, Minister for Social Development and Human Security,

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm delighted to speak to you today at this very important seminar. A year ago, we had a conference at this very hotel, where we discussed with some distinguished guests, the possibility of introducing gender quotas into Thailand's elections. Since that time, the political landscape in Thailand changed. Thailand elected its first female Prime Minister. While her election hasn't rewritten the rules for women seeking public office, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's election has

given women a new goal to aspire to. But her election does not guarantee other women the same political success.

Out of about roughly 7,000 political positions in villages and towns across Thailand, women account for just 4 percent. In Parliament, women make up just 16%, although they represent more than half of Thailand's population.

We're back here a year later to try to improve those numbers. In that time, we've commissioned a study on the possibilities for increasing the number of women in politics, led by the distinguished Dr. Juree Vitchit-Vadakan. After looking at some of her preliminary research, I am encouraged by the possibilities for women.

But gender equality, like any goal, is a process.

It was certainly a long, drawn out process for Siriporn Panyasen, a courageous leader from Lampang,

and the featured biography in the documentary we will be sharing with you shortly. The film chronicles her difficult childhood—where she had to drop out of school to care for her sick father and provide for her family and talks about her early political struggles, like overcoming gender stereotypes.

Globally, the barriers for women are similar to that in Thailand. Women are subject to more vulnerable forms of employment and many lack benefits or security. Many top level jobs still go to men, and more importantly in this context, women are vastly underrepresented in the halls of government. Worldwide, less than 20 percent of parliamentarians are women.

As much as we recognize that there's room for improvement, we must also recognize the successes as well. Thailand ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and has implemented policies that have elevated the status of women. From combating against domestic violence and human trafficking to dramatically reducing poverty, the

efforts of the Royal Thai Government have allowed women to enjoy a more equal footing in society.

Thai girls and boys have nearly equal educational opportunities.

Girls are performing better in school, outperform boys in languages and arts, and are outpacing men in higher education.

The labour market is more open, and Thai women participate actively across many sectors.

Empowering women to lead their communities and become fully invested in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families couldn't be any more critical. If women make up more than 50 percent of the population, they should be entitled to equal representation.

We hope this seminar continues our national conversation on women in Thai politics. We are very

pleased that the Prime Minister and His Excellency Mr. Abhisit have lent us their voices in this effort. I look forward to our discussion today and to chipping away at those final barriers that hold women back. It's hard work, but surely worth the effort.

Thank you.

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