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## **AWARE launches project to publish State of the Nation's Women report**

AWARE, Singapore's leading women's rights advocacy group, is launching a two-year project to reach out to a wide range of women in Singapore and gather their views on the issues that most affect them. These views, together with other research findings, will be published in 2011 in a report titled *The State of the Nation's Women*.

In its scope, the *State of the Nation's Women (SNW)* report will be similar to the CEDAW shadow reports that AWARE produces and submits to the United Nations. CEDAW, or the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, is regarded as an international bill of rights for women. Countries that sign the convention have to submit national reports at least once every four years on the progress they have made to remove all discrimination against women. Shadow reports are submitted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and are considered alongside the national reports by the UN's CEDAW Committee.

Like the CEDAW report, the SNW report will examine the state of Singapore's women in areas such as employment, health, family, leadership, and media. But a key difference is that the voices of Singapore's women will feature prominently in the SNW report.

"Our CEDAW shadow reports have identified the inequalities that still exist and the many issues that need to be addressed, such as the lack of sexual harassment laws, stereotyping in the media, the need for more day care centres for young parents and for greater financial security for older women," said Dana Lam, AWARE president.

"What we will now do, in parallel with our CEDAW work, is reach out to women in Singapore and get their views on all these issues. We want to get the women to talk and we will listen carefully. We want to find out what they see as the key challenges in their lives, what they would like to see by way of changed or new policies and laws. The *State of the Nation's Women* report will cover largely

the same ground as the CEDAW reports but it will be from the perspective of a cross-section of Singapore's women."

AWARE will reach these women in a variety of ways, including a forum series called 'Stand Up and Speak Out'. There will also be talks and small group discussions, and at least one major conference. Joint projects and other forms of collaboration with the media and with other NGOs will be explored.

### **ON-GOING PROJECTS**

- a) The **CEDAW subcommittee** will continue to work on AWARE's 3<sup>rd</sup> shadow report.
  
- b) The **AWARE Training Institute (ATI)** will be going full steam ahead to develop and conduct programmes in three areas – skills development, knowledge building, and self-knowledge. The aim is to educate, enable and empower women to achieve their highest potential in society. These programmes include:
  - ATI's **Body Image Workshops** will help young girls to reflect on body image, and concepts of attractiveness and beauty, to enable them to deal with body image and self esteem issues.
  - Following from AWARE's major recent report on **sexual harassment** which showed that more than 50% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment at work, ATI is currently developing workshops to train organisations to deal with sexual harassment and assault. The sexual harassment team comprising HR practitioners, lawyers and social workers target to provide by the end of the year a comprehensive package of services to train and advise companies on policies and practices to prevent and deal with sexual harassment and assault in the workplace.
  - The **financial training** programme for women is being enhanced. The aim here is to help women with financial empowerment. Further announcements on this will be made shortly.
  - **Women in Conversation** is an innovative approach to learning. ATI provides safe spaces for women to get together in small groups to learn from each other and to share their personal and common experiences in matters such as sex, dating, marriage, gender discrimination, career development, leadership.
  
- c) AWARE is looking to expand its **Direct Services**, particularly the Helpline which operates Mondays to Fridays from 3pm to 9.30pm. The Helpline is now open from 12 noon to 9.30 p.m. Mondays to Fridays for a trial period of 3 months to assess needs and viability.

With AWARE's increased membership the plan is to look into:

- a. Increasing the pool of Helpline volunteers
- b. Training Helpline volunteers to handle a wider variety of situations, and to field calls in Mandarin and/or Malay. Collaborations with complementary NGOs may be explored.

AWARE's Counselling Service has seen an increase in new cases in the past month. We will continue to build on this, and we will also continue with The Befrienders service and Legal Clinic.

- d) A recently launched project is a study by the **Singles Subcommittee** to identify the attitudes and public policies that affect how single women live in Singapore. The study will examine various categories of singles including ageing singles and single care-givers of the elderly or children.

### **AWARE TURNS 25**

AWARE, which was registered on 25 November 1985, will turn 25 in November 2010. To celebrate its 25 years, AWARE will organise a Festival of Women which will showcase the talent and achievements of Singapore women. This Festival will be spread out over 2010 and 2011, with events that range from the literary and artistic to the entertaining and energetic.

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