



## **The next 25 years begin now**

**Opening Remarks by Dana Lam, President**

**Media Conference 6 July 2009**

Good Afternoon, everyone.

It's been a while and it's good to see you all today.

I'd like to begin by formally introducing the team:

They will be helping with answering your questions later.

You will find the CVs of the current Exco in your information pack. I'm sure they will be very happy to speak with you after we're through with the formalities today.

### **NEW MEDIA**

You could ask, "where would we be today without Twitter and Youtube and Facebook?"

As we speak, our new media volunteers - Robin Rheaume, Callan Tham and June Yang - are tweeting our messages to the world. Also helping us get out there are documentary makers Millie Phuah & Gel Yeo who are videoing the conference today.

As you can see, we are ably supported in the new media department as we move forward from here.

### **STAFF**

Before we get down to other business, I would like you to meet another set of important people who have been keeping the fire burning here at AWARE:

Kerry Wilcock is head of Direct Services. She is supported by Dr Arati Vidyadhar and Grace Phua. Some of you will already know our very affable, Mardiana Abunaim, manager, Public Education, including ATI and, Priyanka Awasthi, our programme executive. Lin Phua is our Accounts Executive - the one looking after our books, Patricia Tay provides administrative support to the Exco while Rina-

Marie looks after membership and programmes. They are the people whose loyalty and good thinking we have counted on during the recent crisis. Our Centre Manager Selina Gan, who joined us in June, could not be here today.

### **AWARE- No Other Name Will Do**

You will forgive me for taking a moment and quoting you some Shakespeare at this point:

“What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
Shakespeare, Romeo & Juliet.

We are the Association of Women for Action and Research - everything is in the name. For nearly a quarter of the century from our inception on 25 November 1985, women, action and research have been our focus and our strength. It is also in our signature role as a feminist research and advocacy group that AWARE has done her most important and pioneering work. AWARE's place as agent provocateur in the nation's civil society has also been sharpened by the recent crisis.

AWARE will be 25 in November next year. We stand proud of the legacy bestowed by our founding members. And we are just as proud of the 1,414 women and the many others who stood up to be counted and whose articulate and informed exertions on that fateful day, 2 May 2009, ensured that we are still here today. We thank everyone who came to the EGM to stand up for their principles.

### **The State of the Nation's Women (SNW) Report**

As the nation has prospered, so have its women progressed. However, some deep-seated gender imbalances and stereotyping continue to persist. These are evident everywhere.

They are evident in overt, sexualised images of women on the back of buses, in our living rooms on tv, in pages of our newspapers; in public policies that still hold up (I'd say burden) our men as heads of households.

But, where they are the most evident must be in the experience of those women who, after a hard day's work, are seen running for the bus for fear of returning too late to mind the home and children. This is told to me by one who knows, and who opines that this is the reason women have

taken longer to get to the top of the corporate ladder: women simply don't have time to network. Pick up any book on corporate climbers and you will be told the merit, the necessity, of networking. But, of course, there are exceptions to the rule.

However, you would think that things might have changed. AWARE published its first report on the Singapore Woman in 1988. In it is a caricature of a woman in a lab coat. On the wall is a clock. The hour hand is at 5 o'clock. Near its edge, in animated handwriting, are the words 'tick tock tick'. Above the woman's head is a large thought bubble. In it is a small child under a big sign that says, Day Care Centre. A tear runs from one of the child's eyes. Above the child's head is another thought bubble. It simply reads, "mommy". Higher up on the same page is the interior of a kitchen and the woman, now in overalls, is standing between a pile of laundry on her left and a pile of dishes on her right. The text on the top of her head reads "!AYOH"

We think it is time for another report. It is time to train the spotlight back on women's lives.

### **Action Research**

Incorporated in our name, the Association of Women for Action and Research, are the two words action and research. Together, "Action Research", as Ching Wi can explain, is a research approach that can help bring about change. It is interactive and changes in personal perspectives are achieved through the collaborative process. We shall employ this process extensively in the State of the Nation's Women (SNW) project.

The SNW project will see AWARE volunteers going out to meet women, to engage women in conversations about their lived experiences. These conversations will happen, as far as possible, in women's own spaces.

Some of these conversations have already begun in a small way under the ATI. (Corinna can elaborate). These consultations will multiply and evolve in range in the following months. What we have now is a road map. We will fill in the sights as we continue to draw on the expertise and the creativity of our expanded 3,000 members, and others over the next months.

In keeping with the spirit and other signs of our time, some of the stops we are looking at include a series of public forums - the Stand Up and Speak Out series- that will allow women to articulate, debate and discuss issues that are important to them. As formal discursive spaces, these forums

will employ both creative and academic methodologies and complement informal conversations on the ground.

### **Deliverables**

What we want achieved at the end of the project is to have engaged with and listened to as many women as possible in their spaces, on their issues and, as much as possible, in a language they are comfortable with.

On the personal level, we know the women will find strength in sharing their experiences and in being heard. We hope to open up their space for them to support each other as they look for balance and seek to take charge of their lives.

On the national level, we think the State of the Nation's Women report will inform policy makers of the gaps between women's real needs and the instruments of state (The Women's Charter, for example) that currently inform policies.

For AWARE, the report will help in the shaping of priorities and focus for further research and advocacy.

### **The VISION**

What we hope to see, at the end of the next 25 years, is a truly developed nation where we as a people are informed, inspired and embracing of diversity; who trust, respect and allow all women and men their choices. Where no one, woman or man, will be discriminated against for their gender, race, language or religion.

### **TRAINING & AWARE LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION**

Our focus in the next months as we get our projects into gear is to build the capacity internally at AWARE and externally in the wider society. The AWARE Training Institute (ATI) will enhance its programmes to offer training courses in three broad areas:

- (1) Skills Development in areas that will enable better future leaders for research and advocacy. For example, effective communication, forums and conference organising, report writing, negotiation skills.

- (2) Knowledge Building. Knowledge is power. For example, what is CEDAW? What is the Women's Charter? What is Feminism and Gender equality? How do they affect you? How can we use them to change our lives?
- (3) Self-Knowledge. To enable women to recognise stereotypes, negative messages that impact on personal choices, expectations, mental, emotional and physical health. To build self esteem.

AWARE staff, the Exco and other volunteers will have opportunities to enhance individual capabilities as they prepare to work on their projects. In this way, we are ensuring that a next generation of leaders is being prepared and trained in the operational skills and in the feminist ethos of equality and non-discrimination as we work to realise this year's objectives.

It's a privilege to be in office at this time and we are excited about the work ahead.

Thank you.