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Mme. ZHEN Yan's Speech at the 14 APEC WLN

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Mme. Chair, your excellencies,
Distinguished guests, sisters and friends,

Good afternoon.

I have been looking forward to the 14 APEC WLN meeting, as in face of the severe challenges posed by the global financial crisis, there are so many new issues and topics relating to women and sustainable development that we need to sit down to discuss with each other. This year the WLN meeting has chosen a very important topic of strategic meaning, women in sustainable development. It is a full recognition of women's significant role in economic and social development. Moreover, our discussions and deliberations at this meeting would help to build and enhance our confidence in overcoming the difficulties in face of the financial tsunami.

Today I would like to share with you how women entrepreneurs in China have been working their way through, and how the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) has been taking various actions to help women to start their business or to find employment.

There is an old saying in China that goes like this, "When spring comes and warms up the river water, ducks are always the first to know it." Women entrepreneurs are actively involved in economic activities and they are always the first to feel the extra difficulties now facing their

businesses operation. Right now there are 29 million women entrepreneurs, making up roughly 20% of all entrepreneurs. 95% of these women's businesses are in medium or small size, and 45% are in service sector. 60% of their employees are women. Due to the spreading of the international financial crisis, China's real economy including export-oriented economy has been greatly impacted. Many women entrepreneurs are quick in changing their business strategies accordingly. They turn their eyes to the domestic market of 1.3 billion people, make use of the government's supportive policies and take flexible and diversified forms of operation. They have tried hard not to lay off employees, not to downsize the headcounts, and not to own their employees wages. Most of their businesses have survived and remain vibrant. They have also made great efforts in accommodating other unemployed workers and the surplus labor from the rural areas, and therefore contributed to the successful creation of job opportunities and to the societal harmony and stability in China. According to a sample survey conducted by the China Women Entrepreneurs' Association where I also serve as Vice President, over 70% of the women entrepreneurs are pleased or very pleased with their business performance.

As we know, China, with its vast population, is in the process of rapid social transition. The economic and social development remains uneven in urban and rural areas as well as in different regions. The supply of labor force still exceeds demand in the market. There are still discrimination based on gender, age and other factors in the labor market. All these still restrict the further participation of women in business in China. Especially since last year, the number of unemployed women is on increase, girl university graduates find it increasingly difficult to get jobs, and those women migrant workers who now return to their hometowns to set up their own businesses are also facing more difficulties.

The Chinese government has made a set of policies and taken a series of actions to "ensure growth, people's life, and stability". Many of such polices and actions have benefited women in business and provided new opportunities for their development. All-China

Women's Federation, as a non-governmental organization dedicated to representing and safeguarding women's rights and interests, has also made it its priority task to help women find employment or set up their own business so as to ensure women's life quality and their immediate interests. Our actions mainly fall in three areas, namely getting policy support, generating employment or business opportunities, and providing training for women.

Firstly, we take actions to get policy support from the government in order to help women in business in accessing funding.

Lack of funding is the main obstacle facing women in business. Therefore we have worked hard and made the government to issue the policy that women in both urban and rural areas meeting the required criteria may have access to loans of micro-credit with interest fully sponsored by the financial department, and that the ceiling of the micro-credit loans is increased from 50,000 RMB to 80,000 RMB. Such a policy has made it much easier for women in accessing funding to start a small or micro business.

Secondly, we take various actions to help women get self-employed or find employment.

For instance, we have launched a project of mentoring girl university graduates to start their own business. It is to encourage women entrepreneurs to provide internships for girl university graduates, and the objective of our project is to set up 5000 bases of mentoring girl university graduates as interns.

We have also continued and improved our project to provide more and better services for rural women who lost jobs or land, and those migrate to cities in forms of providing consultation, favorable policies, job opportunities, and etc.. During the first half of this year, our federations in about 200 big and medium-sized cities have helped women with 332,500 jobs.

There is another project to promote local or courtyard business among

rural women. It is to encourage the surplus women laborers to process materials supplied by customers in the market so that they do not need to leave their hometown and family to become migrant workers in cities. At present, there are more than 3 million women in 46,000 villages participating in this project. It not only helps these women to generate more income, but also helps these women to balance their work and life responsibilities, as they can remain home and take care of the old and young in their families.

Thirdly, we work together with the government to provide training and capacity building for women. In the last 3 years, we have trained more than 5 million rural women.

Sisters and friends,

You may wonder how come a women NGO could generate enough resources to do all this work? I'd like to share with you that All-China Women's Federation enjoys three unique advantages. One is our umbrella-like organizational network throughout the country which enables us to reach all the villages and communities at the very grassroots level. Our second advantage is the very dedicated full-time staff and our volunteers. The last but by no means the least advantage is the good reputation and high prestige we enjoy in the society. People say that the women's federation is like a mother's home to all women, and women hold up half of sky for China's economic and social development.

Sisters and friends, there is an old saying in China. "Stones from other hills may serve to polish jade of this one". It means that good practices and lessons from others can help us to improve our work. It is my hope that through participating this WLN meeting, we could share our experiences and learn from each other, and together we may integrate women and gender issues in APEC.

May I take this opportunity to thank our host, the beautiful Singapore, again for the wonderful platform they provide, and all the facilities and services to make our meeting here very pleasant, successful and fruitful. Thank you.