

# Asian Breeze

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# Women Today

## *Norway: A Haven for Gender Equality and Families? Politics that pay off in economic terms and the number of babies*

In 2009 the Norwegian Gender Equality Act turns 30. These last 30 years have seen substantial equality between the genders come true in Norway. When 300 large companies in Europe were measured, Norway scored highest among the countries having 44.2% women on company boards. Sweden came in second with 26.9%. And Portugal came in at the bottom with 0.8% women on boards (*Could the Right Man for the Job be a Woman?:* Hudson, 2008).

During the last 30 years, many laws have been amended and more parental rights secured, enabling both parents' possibilities to pursue both paid work and family. From July 1<sup>st</sup> mothers and fathers share 46 weeks parental leave of absence with a 100% or 56 weeks with 80% refunding of their salaries, provided they have qualified through paid work before birth. Both parents have the right to stay at home to care for sick children (below 12 years of age) 10 days pr. year pr. parent, with pay. Parliament has 40% female representatives, as have the 430 elected municipal bodies. Cabinet enjoys 50% of each gender. 80% of women have paid work. And Norway has a fertility rate of 1.96, one of the highest in Europe.

The "Columbi Egg" of Norwegian politics has been to combine gender equality with comprehensive family and parental provisions. No person, regardless of genders, should be forced to choose *either* work *or* having children. It is of course up to the women and men, the families themselves, to decide how to lead their lives. Public policies secure the opportunity to choose freely — there is no "forcing" anyone. Obviously this type of political thinking promotes economic development and stability.

Today most people in Norway take gender equality for granted. But the mission is not yet accomplished. Cultural habits, traditions and stereotypes prevail. Still we see a very gender-segmented labor market, and young people tend to choose gender-traditional educations and professions. Mostly men are top managers in the private corporate sector vs. 21% women. Many women (40% vs. 13% men) work part-time when having small children. Consequently, they loose out on pension points. There is still a 15% gender-based pay gap per hour (as in the EU on an average).

However, the White Paper: "Men, Masculinities and Gender Equality" submitted to the Parliament in December 2008<sup>1</sup>, shows an enormous change in men's roles and not the least: fathers' roles. Fathers simply take a lot of responsibility at home and for the



*Arni HOLE*  
Arni HOLE  
Director General,  
the Department of Family  
and Equality,  
the Royal Ministry of  
Children and Equality

children. They cook and clean and pick up the kids from kindergarten.

Norwegian politics has seen the merit of affirmative actions as a way to promote equality. In 1981, a quota was introduced in the Gender Equality Act demanding 40% of the underrepresented gender in all public appointed committees and councils. In 1993, the new Municipal Act introduced a 40% quota for all appointed bodies from the municipal council, and the first fathers' obligatory quota of 4 weeks with pay, within the parental leave scheme (see above, non-transferable to the mother). Today 90% of the fathers are taking their obligatory 6 weeks leave which will be expanded to 10 weeks by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. In 2003, the Parliament voted for 40% quotas for the underrepresented sex in board-rooms of four types of companies. The most significant change came for the public limited companies (stock-exchange noted) where the representation of women in these 500 large companies rose from 7% in 2003 to 40% in 2008. Able and educated women were not hard to find.

In the competition for competence and to attract talents, both public and corporate sectors need to promote family friendly surroundings for women and men, mothers and fathers. Thus the laws and regulations on parental leave and other welfare provisions, provide a favorable setting for making it "acceptable" (in business life) to be a parent, regardless of one's gender. The tripartite cooperation between the state, the employers and the employees (since 1950), takes care of the joint financing of expenditures.

Talents are evenly divided among the genders, in child-caring and rearing as in economic decisions and management. Hence, equality is a win-win situation for both women and men. There is time for new alliances between the sexes.

### Profile of Arni Hole

Arni Hole is Director General for the Department of Family and Equality in the Royal Ministry of Children and Equality since 2001. She holds degrees in Philosophy and Economic History. Hole has held several Director General positions within public service (5 Ministries) including the Norwegian School of Sports and the Research Foundation of the Oslo Region. She has served on many boards.

<sup>1</sup> The White Paper cites a measurement done through a broad comparative survey based on data from 20 years back and in 2007.



### Gender-Sensitive Measures to Prevent HIV/AIDS Part 2

#### Groups Vulnerable to HIV Infection



**Yoko TSURUGI**  
Medical Staff, International Programs,  
Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association  
Obstetrics and gynecology physician

In the first lecture, I explained that HIV spreads most often through unprotected sex with an infected partner, or through the sharing of contaminated drug needles or syringes. I also stated that during the early stage, HIV spreads among most vulnerable groups, most notably Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), Men Sex with Men (MSM) and Intravenous Drug Users (IDU). It is essential to take effective measures while this disease is in its early stage, since HIV is likely to spread, infecting many more people outside these most vulnerable groups.

CSW, for instance, are extremely susceptible to HIV infection through sexual contact with their customers. If CSW have high HIV infection rates, their customers are also at high risk of infection. Infected customers eventually infect their partners. MSM can also transmit HIV to their female partners, since some men are bisexual. Other men marry women in order to conceal the fact of their homosexuality, so as to evade social prejudice and discrimination. IDU who are infected by contaminated needles or syringes are also likely to infect their partners with HIV. Since women are infected with HIV primarily through sexual contact, regardless of their sexual orientation or number of partners, every woman is at risk of HIV so long as she has sexual contacts without using condoms. If HIV spreads among women, the number of infected children can increase through mother-to-child transmission, since HIV can be transmitted to babies through pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.

Immediately after HIV begins to spread outside most vulnerable groups, the entire society will suffer from the epidemic. In general, a society is considered to be experiencing an HIV epidemic when the HIV infection rate of the general population exceeds 2%. In some countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the infection rates of pregnant women exceed 30% (the infection rate of pregnant women is considered to be roughly proportional to the adult HIV prevalence of the respective country). In Cambodia, where I once worked with an anti-tuberculosis and HIV project, the HIV infection rate of the general population used to exceed 2%, the highest in Asia. In a society where 2% of whose population is infected, you will encounter infected people in your daily life. The risk of infection is so high and immediate that

people begin to consider HIV to be their own problem, rather than someone else's. The epidemic is so pressing an issue that most people feel they cannot afford to discriminate against infected people.

As I have indicated thus far, HIV/AIDS is by no means a disease infecting specific groups. Rather, it is a disease that can infect anyone. Once HIV spreads throughout a society, however, some groups are much more vulnerable than others. These vulnerable groups comprise women and adolescents. In my first lecture I explained that in many countries, female CSW do not receive sufficient education regarding HIV. The same is true of women in general. Compared with men, women, who receive less education, find it difficult to obtain and understand related information. This lack of information renders women more vulnerable to HIV infection than men are. Moreover, since HIV is transmitted through sexual contact, HIV-infected women are usually regarded as being sexually active (even though many are infected by their husbands). Sexually active women are often regarded as "disgraceful." In almost all societies, people tend to have negative images of sexually active women, although many societies are relatively permissive toward sexually active men. Many women hesitate to access various medical services concerning HIV/AIDS simply because AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease. Although mother-to-child transmission can be prevented only if pregnant women infected with HIV are detected and treated adequately during their pregnancy, in many societies even today, pregnant women do not have access to even the most basic medical examinations.

Another vulnerable group comprises adolescents. In the hope that youngsters will keep themselves "pure" and "clean," adults tend to conceal sex information from youngsters. In actuality, however, of all generations, youngsters are the most curious about sex. Being sensitive toward adults' strong disapproval of their interest in sex, youngsters tend to engage in sexual acts secretly. If they have any problem as a result, they cannot consult with adults. Nor do youngsters have the money needed to resolve such problems. Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that youngsters comprise another group that is extremely vulnerable to HIV infection.



## New Foreign Correspondents

In 1991, the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) established the foreign correspondents system to build up broad networks with people in overseas countries, particularly in the Asia and Pacific region.

This year KFAW was pleased to receive 18 foreign correspondent applications for FY 2009 foreign correspondents. Of the 18 applicants from 15 countries, KFAW selected nine from nine countries. As a result, the total number of past and present foreign correspondents has reached 245 in 35 countries. Through its network of foreign correspondents, KFAW will continue to provide up-to-date information from various parts of the world.

### Your Daily Life - Clothing, Dietary Life and Living Environment

Over the past few years, KFAW has asked its foreign correspondents to report on such themes as “women and disaster,” “women and community activities,” and “the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.” In response, foreign correspondents have written reports on women’s situations in their respective regions and countries, as well as on national policies regarding women’s issues.

For this year, the KFAW has selected a more familiar theme: Your Daily Life. Although many Japanese readers are interested in the daily life of people in other parts of the world, gathering related information on the Internet is more difficult than collecting data on political or social issues. The KFAW asked its foreign correspondents to report on actual daily life of people in their respective regions/countries, focusing on clothing, dietary life and living environment.

The next issue (No. 57) of *Asian Breeze* will feature reports on clothing. Showing photographs, foreign correspondents will introduce ethnic costumes unique to their countries, and will explain on which occasions local people put on those costumes. Issues No. 58 and No. 59 will feature dietary life and living environment respectively. The reports will be characterized by detailed descriptions that only local residents can provide.

Burkina Faso



VOKOUMA Jocelyne specialized in history and anthropology. After developing her career as a journalist, schoolteacher and human rights technical advisor, she was appointed Secretary General of the Women Promotion Ministry in Burkina Faso. Currently, as a research worker at the Institute of the Sciences of Societies, she is studying her country’s clothing culture and the art of cooking. Accordingly, she is particularly interested in this year’s theme. This is the fourth consecutive year she has served as a KFAW foreign correspondent.



Uganda



As the Chairwoman of the Uganda Muslim Women Vision, Hadijah KIBIRA is dedicated to promoting protection of women’s rights, women’s education and welfare for women. Having earned a master’s degree in regional development, she currently serves as a part-time lecturer at the Islamic University in Uganda. In 2003, she visited Japan to attend a JICA Seminar. This will be the second time she has served as a KFAW foreign correspondent, following her service during the 14<sup>th</sup> period.

India



Satoko CHATERJEE was born in Niigata Prefecture, Japan. After working at a local TV station and a senior high school (part-time lecturer), she is currently committed to environmental education and regional development education at an NGO named the Development Research Communication and Services Center. She has lived in West Bengal, India, for 12 years. This will be the second time she has served as a KFAW foreign correspondent, following her service during the 17<sup>th</sup> period.

## Uzbekistan



After specializing in philology at Tashkent State Pedagogical University, ALIKULOVA Nargiza engaged in comparative studies of Asian politics and administration for two years at a Japanese graduate school. She has also served as a PR specialist at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan and in the UNDP Project on Capacity Building for Internet Technological Development and Promotion in Uzbekistan.

## Republic of Korea



LEE Kyoung Hee loves drawing, and specialized in design at university. After graduation, she worked at a design firm, designing web pages and editing books. Currently, as a staff member of the 2009 Incheon Global Fair & Festival Organization Committee, she is committed to preparations for the event, which will be held in Incheon for 80 days, from August 2009.

## Canada



Subadhra RAI is a Singaporean woman living in Canada. This will be the third time she has served as a KFAW foreign correspondent. The last time (15<sup>th</sup> period) she was in Thailand and reported on that country. As a college instructor, she currently teaches internationally educated nurses. As a foreign correspondent, she was invited to Kitakyushu in 2002 and participated in various exchange programs with local residents.

## Papua New Guinea



Andrew IKI, the first KFAW foreign correspondent living in Papua New Guinea, currently serves at the Ministry of Community Development as a program officer. In June 2008, he visited Japan to attend the JICA Seminar. At present, he is struggling to incorporate into the Ministry's programs what he learned at the seminar in Japan.

## Thailand



Satoko PORTEOUS was born in Tokyo. After studying in the U.S. and Hong Kong, she worked at the research and marketing sections of Japanese and U.S.-based enterprises. She has lived outside Japan for the past 15 years, moving from country to country with her British husband, due to his business demands. For the past two years, she has resided on Samui Island in Thailand. As the mother of three children, she is busy fulfilling her parental responsibilities. Yet, she has decided to apply for a KFAW foreign correspondent's position, in order to build networks with many women in other parts of the world.

## Vietnam



LE Thi has a long career as a researcher of gender and family issues and publisher of many books. Until 2004, she had served as an advisor to the Swedish and Danish Fund for Promotion on Gender Equality in Vietnam. This is the sixth time for her to serve as a KFAW foreign correspondent, the first time being in the ninth period.

## FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS

(Access other foreign correspondents' reports on a website: <http://www.kfaw.or.jp/about/18-report.html.en>)

# Women and Community Activities

## Haunted by Violence

**Tehreem HASAN (Pakistan)**

A taunt or pighore is enough to endanger the lives of some women living in the conservative setups of Pakistani society. A taunt given by the community is considered one of the biggest threats to one's honour. People even leave their villages to protect themselves. It is commonly believed that a pighore could continue to haunt families for generations. Many incidents of murder have taken place based only on verbal taunts.

Memunai, the daughter of a khan was famous for her beauty. There were innumerable proposals for her but they were turned down as she was to be wed with her cousin Sher Alam. The khans of the village would send jirgas to her father to convince him to change his mind but he had already made up his mind. After marriage, Memunai told her husband about a paternal cousin, whose intentions she always questioned. The conversation was heard by the spiteful cousin, who made a pledge to himself to create drift between the newlyweds. One day, in the absence of Sher Alam, some guests who were staying in his hujra, ran short of tobacco. On the demand of others, one man went to Sher Alam's house to fetch tobacco from there. After inquiring about the purpose of his visit, Memunai, from behind the door, handed him some tobacco, as a gesture of "melmastiya" (hospitality) towards her husband's guests. This gesture was enough for her cousin to fabricate a scandalous story of how Memunai had damaged Sher Alam's family honour. Sher Alam faced with this "pighore," as a "pakhtoon," is extremely vulnerable. The only way Sher Alam could free himself of the affliction was to prove his allegiance to the "Pakhtunwali" (the Pakhtun code of conduct). So Sher Alam slit his wife's throat.

Although not as severe as in the illiterate, feudal villages, violence also occurs in the cities there. For example, Naseem got married and had two daughters. After just a few years, her husband died and she was forced by her parents to wed again. She gave birth to a son. Her new husband started complaining about why her daughters were receiving the same education as his son. Although much younger than his sisters, the boy also started adopting the typical male attitude of expecting his sisters to look after his needs and of ordering them about. The father discriminated against the girls at every chance. Years of disagreement and quarrels led to Naseem's divorce. Now she lives alone with her daughters, who have received a good education and have started working. We feel sorry for the little boy who just became his father's pawn.

## Education and Participation of Girls and Women in Decision Making

**TIANN Monie (Cambodia)**

In Cambodia, as a good education is a very important part of being empowered, all schools should consider the needs of girls and provide safe spaces for learning. Based on findings and various research in Cambodia, girls/women should be allowed to participate in making the decisions that affect them and their futures. Participation can be one of the most powerful forms of empowerment since it lets us really think through the issues and judge the outcomes of the decisions made.

Women face more constraints in accessing the resources of modern society than men. Large gender disparities exist in rates of adult literacy as well as participation in formal education and the wage labour market.

In formal education, for example, which is the key to many aspects of modern society, women are seriously under-represented. There are varied reasons for this, connected to perceptions of gender roles. Girls are expected to perform more domestic chores than boys. Thus opportunity costs are high when girls attend school. As a woman's status is to a great extent determined by her role as a wife and mother and not through her work, higher education is deemed to be not necessary. Girls' resulting lack of qualifications and skills severely restricts their opportunities in the labour market. Men dominate all professional fields and national decision-making positions.

Improving women's access to educational services is a significant investment for the country's development. Education expands the employment opportunities open to women and improves their productive capacity and social status. Education provides information on contraception, nutrition and sanitation, which potentially improves the quality of life for a woman and her family. Literacy and numeracy also enhance the ability to access and exchange ideas and information and to identify and solve problems. This expands the range of life choices open to a woman and her ability to improve the quality of her life. In this way, education not only improves women's position in Cambodia society, but also benefits society as a whole.

In conclusion, we must help people talk openly about how gender norms and roles can lead to discrimination and violence. Moreover, with the support of family, community and society, women can access all forms of education. And the strong voices of girls/women can ring out.



## Excision

**VOKOUMA Jocelyne (Burkina Faso)**

Excision is an old traditional practice which is dangerous for girl child's physical integrity and health. It consists of cutting out whole or a part of her genital organs which can be clitoris, the little or the big lips. The pain is so sharp that, some girls' children die, after losing blood.

Mothers and aunts play an important role in this tradition because children are afraid of excision. In respect for tradition, mothers and aunts have to obliged them to accept. In general, the girl child trusts her mother. The mother uses this kind of affective relationship to flatter her daughter by sending her to spend time with her father's grand sister. The child will then have sweets, eggs or a nice gift. Happily, the girl child follows her mother. The girl has to wake up early in the morning and follow her aunt to an unknown house. When they arrive, the young girl has to change her clothes and join other girls who are waiting for the same fate. It forbidden to cry as this brings shame to the family. She has to be brave.

Once, a woman asked me "Do you know what excision is?" I say no! (Because I'm coming from a culture which doesn't practice it). She continued to explain: "after cutting the clitoris with a traditional knife, older women wash our sex with boiling water and you can't cry. There are two other women who hold you tightly and shut young girls' mouths".

Although the age of a girl child excision is about 0 to 18 years old, it concerns mainly girls who are 10 years old. The practice equals violence and discrimination against the girl child. One reason for this practice is to control the child's sexuality during their puberty, adulthood and after marriage. After cutting the clitoris or a part of it, depending on the region, ethnic group, religions and cultures, women who are excised have to sew up their vaginal apertures. They only leave a little opening for their menstrual flow.

In addition to East Africa, excision is carried out in many countries in West Africa. So, the prevalence rates are respectively 86% in Mali; 77% in Burkina Faso; 42% in Ivory Coast; 13% in Benin; 5% in Ghana; and 2.2% in Niger. All of these countries' hardly work to fight against the phenomenon which hobbles girl children's growth in the society.

In Burkina Faso, the government created on May 18, 1990 a national committee to fight against the practice of excision. February 6<sup>th</sup> is "International Day of Tolerance Zero to Women Genital Mutilations." In fact, because of the immigration, most African populations continue to practice excision in Europe. About 30,000 excised women and girl child live in France. In addition, a potential of 10,000 to 20,000 little girls are exposed to the risk of excision. In Germany, there are about 20,000 excised

women.

In most African countries, laws seriously punish excision. Africa's first ladies created a regional structure named: "Actions' Synergy of African First Ladies." From October 13-15 2008, they held a big meeting in Ouagadougou with the support of experts from all the concerned countries. The conclusions recommended that the various states' leadership make the problem of excision a national priority. The partners have increased their financial support for this problem. As a national strategy, when possible, the hood of the clitoris should be restored through surgical acts. States disseminate information about national laws to punish excision and push social education actions to prevent new cases. National programs also donate for example bicycles to help field actors to run from village to village to talk about the bad consequences of excision, such as, sexual diseases, HIV/AIDS, medical complications for child delivery, death, psychological problems, etc. As for measures to protect victims, there are articles 380, 381 and 382 of the Penal Code of Burkina Faso adopted in 1996 to reprimand women's genital mutilations. Although this tradition has not been extinguished, these kinds of actions importantly work towards the imprisonment of the guilty and their accomplices, helping to change public attitudes.

## COVER PROFILE



**Naomi KUBO**  
Printmaker

Naomi Kubo has always enjoyed pictures. She drew still-life paintings at a painting class and learned a copper engraving method from her master, Mr. Itsuji HIRATA. She also embraced the possibility of monochrome expressions. That was the beginning of her career as a printmaker. Recently the themes of her block prints resolve around "fire" or "water" which are essential to life but can also threaten it. Her creative activities thus far include holding group or personal exhibitions in her hometown, Kitakyushu City as well as other Japanese cities, like Osaka and Kyoto. Last year, she won "the Gold Prize of the Kitakyushu Artist Association Show". Although she also works as a dispatched worker, it is challenging for her to balance her work and private life. Kubo says that wood block printing fascinates her so much as there is nothing like the thrill of printing. Each print work differs based on the spreading of the ink. Her dream is to hold private art exhibition overseas by "continuing to create high quality works."

# Participating in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Professor, The Japanese Red Cross Kyushu International College of Nursing KFAW Chief Researcher

Masami SHINOZAKI

The 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was held at the UN Headquarters in New York from March 2 to 13, 2009. I participated in the session and various related events up until March 5. The priority theme for this year's session was "Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS."

## \*CSW Opening Session and Speeches by Representatives

Many people participated in the CSW opening session. Since the conference room was packed, an additional room was prepared for NGO members who could not



▲CSW Opening Session

find seats. After expressing their gratitude for the participation of so many, including ministers and other high-level politicians, the chairpersons also thanked NGO members for participating in the event and for providing valuable

comments in support of the CSW. Concerning this year's theme, the chairpersons also explained that the sharing of responsibilities between women and men is deeply related to private and informal issues, and that these issues, including problems of women's unpaid work, concern the roles of women and men in families and local communities. Care for persons living with HIV/AIDS, they said, epitomizes these problems.

They emphasized that to promote equal sharing of responsibilities in caregiving, we must first recognize that this issue relates deeply to values of individual societies and cultures. They also emphasized the vital importance of removing excessive burden from caregivers. In the context of the increasing numbers of women working outside their homes, it is even more essential to equally share care responsibilities between women and men, they maintained. I was particularly impressed by their remarks which pointed out that in the current global economic crisis we must carefully monitor national governments. And moreover, we must make sure that they do not delay their efforts to achieve set targets, despite their tight budgets. I truly support these views.

The most interesting speech was given by SHA Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. All the audience members, including both national delegates and NGO representatives, applauded when he said, "Even though I equally share family responsibilities with my wife in my own home,

my approach is not well recognized by other politicians, so I can make little change."

The representative of the EU delegation raised questions regarding work-life balance, collaboration in parental care and social responsibilities.

## \* Side Events

Thanks to the efforts of Hiroko HARA, Chair of Japan Women's Watch (JAWW), we were able to organize a side event at the UN Headquarters, involving both national delegates and NGO representatives. This event, themed "Gender Equality and



▲Side Events

Care in Japan and the International Community," began with greetings by Takashi AHIKI, Minister of the Permanent Mission of Japan, and Keiko TAKEGAWA, Deputy Director-General of the Cabinet Office. Following their greetings, presentations were provided by representatives of the Japanese Association of University Women, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Women's Association for a Better Aging Society, Medecins Sans Frontieres etc. On behalf of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW), I also gave a presentation on the theme: Necessity of East Asian Networks for Elderly Care. The meeting room of this side event, with a capacity of 50 seats, was crammed to nearly twice its capacity. And the audience was extremely enthusiastic. The Q&A session was particularly lively, with many questions raised by the audience. In addition to taking part in this event, I participated in workshops held by women from Kyrgyzstan and South Korea, and an additional one held by the International Council of Jewish Women. I also attended the Beijing + 15 Caucus.

Next year will mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Although the United Nations does not plan any special meeting at the next CSW session (the 54<sup>th</sup>), the UN spokesperson announced that the 54<sup>th</sup> Session will be highlighted by evaluation of past achievements and a future outlook regarding commitments in individual countries. It was also decided that prior to the 54<sup>th</sup> Session, NGOs will organize an NGO forum in New York. To prepare for that forum, NGOs in the Asia-Pacific region will gather in the Philippines in October 2009.



Starting from the issue (June 2008), we capitalize the last names of persons at the beginning of articles. We adopted this policy so that our readers can easily distinguish last names in spite of different customs regarding the writing of family names.



## Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

KITAKYUSHU OTEMACHI BUILDING 3F

OTEMACHI 11-4, KOKURAKITA, KITAKYUSHU, 803-0814 JAPAN

PHONE +81-93-583-3434 FAX +81-93-583-5195

E-mail: [kfaw@kfaw.or.jp](mailto:kfaw@kfaw.or.jp) URL: <http://www.kfaw.or.jp/index.html.en>

## KFAW

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) was established in October of 1990 with a special government fund for revitalization projects. Subsequently, in 1993, the KFAW was recognized as a foundation by the Ministry of Labour (the present the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare). The purpose of the KFAW, through various projects, is to promote the improvement of women's status as well as their mutual understanding and cooperation in Asia.

