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THE COMMUNITY

INTERNATIONAL LIVING IN THE PHILIPPINES



The gender equality agenda team at their Manila meeting, including (front row, from left): Maria Kazmukova from the Czech Republic, Magdalena Sroda from Poland, Asia-Europe Foundation's Singapore-based executive director Wonil Cho, Bam Bjorling from Sweden, Jaime Yambao of ASEF in Manila, Françoise Goffinet from Belgium and Japan Center for International Exchange president Taulashi Yamamoto.

World experts focus on gender equality

By Gail Garcia

MANILA – Over 50 experts on gender equality, economics and labor from Asia and Europe met in Manila last week to discuss economic empowerment of women at grassroots level.

They focused on six case studies conducted in Japan, the Netherlands, Indonesia, France, Philippines and Greece/Turkey, showing how rural women achieved social change and gender equality through micro-financing for business start-ups with funds coming from the government or non-government organizations.

In two days of free-wheeling discussion, the experts looked at ways

to empower women through entrepreneurship, and probed common problems that hinder the growth of women's role.

The main obstacles are "the old traditional and cultural role of men in a family and society, the legal framework in a state, and value systems such as religion where there are certain roles for women and men," said Chia Siow Yue, senior research fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs and director of the six case studies presented at the meeting.

Asia-Europe Foundation executive director Wonil Cho explained: "To achieve gender equality, full freedom and rights of women, we have to go a

long way and we can start by walking together," referring to Asia and Europe.

"This exercise will be very useful for us, we can help each other and share the best wisdom and practices... then it would be much easier to achieve goals," Cho added.

The Manila meeting was the third and final face-to-face gender agenda dialogue between the 38 member states of the Asia-Europe Foundation, a Singapore-based organization that promotes mutual understanding between Asia and Europe.

"A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue 3," as it was called, was organized by Manila-based Asian Institute of Management and the Japan

Center for International Exchange, a non-government organization dedicated to strengthening Japan's role in international networks of policy dialogue and co-operation.

It was held in Manila coinciding with the Philippines' celebration of 100 years of the feminist movement.

Keynote speakers were Magdalena Sroda, Polish government undersecretary of state in charge of equal status for women and men, and former Philippine senator Loren Legarda.

The two earlier gender agenda dialogues were held in Chiba, Japan, in 2001, and then in Tampere, Finland, in 2003.