

## PREFACE

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Are Women in Southeast Asia gaining ground in politics and decision-making today, ten years after the UN World Women Conference in Beijing 1995? The title of this book still carries a question mark. Though many improvements have been undoubtedly achieved, neither a major breakthrough toward a more equal the political representation of women and men nor a more natural design of gender responsive policies and reduction of other gender imbalances has occurred.

The year 2005 is crucial because it brings together the ten-year review of the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the five-year review of progress on the Millennium Declaration, and the anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It needs to be seen whether the necessary next steps can be taken in order to make gender equality more meaningful to the majority of women who can only dream of a world free from poverty, violence and discrimination. However, the current political conjuncture seems to present more chances for setbacks than for rapid improvement of women's human rights worldwide.

The representation of women worldwide currently stands at around 15% in lower houses of parliament. The highest representation can be found in the Nordic Countries with about 40% and the lowest in the Arab States with about 7%. In Asia, it is around 15%. But the goal of gender equity is not only about statistics. We have to look beyond numbers. Which are the underlying structures and mechanisms that still present major obstacles for a better representation of women? How do women make use of power positions? The experiences in Asia show that female presidents, parliamentarians or other leaders are not necessarily more gender sensitive than their male colleagues.

This book attempts to contribute to the Asian review process of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the partnership between South East Asia Women Watch (SEAWWatch) and the Regional Gender Project of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation we were able to come up with this publication. We are happy to present to you in-depth studies of five Southeast

Asian countries and we hope that these qualitative data could complement the ongoing review processes at all levels.

Each of the country studies explains the socio-political, economic and cultural background of the situation of women and men and the drastic under-representation of women in politics and public offices. The data collection pointing out the quantitative and qualitative changes was not always easy since gender-disaggregated data are still not readily available. At the same time encouraging developments, successful mainstreaming efforts, improvements of national legislation and best cases will be introduced so that the overall picture remains less grim.

FES is strongly committed to contributing to the ongoing debate on democracy issues, gender responsive governance and mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policy areas at all levels. It is impossible to imagine the democratic development of countries without a fair and just participation and representation of all citizens. Gender equality in politics is one of the main features. Persistent advocacy and lobbying efforts by strong networks of civil society groups will be crucial for the further strengthening of democratic developments and good gender responsive governance.

FES is very grateful to SEAWWatch, to the authors of the country papers and to all those who have contributed essential information and help for the realization of this book. This book is meant for everyone who is interested to work toward a more gender-just society. A lot is left to be done in the future but nothing is impossible!

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