



BPW International President's Message

Opening speech of Dr. Chonchanok Viravan

**“APEC Forum on Digital Economy for Women 2006:
Innovation and Leadership in Asia-Pacific”**

**United Nations Convention Center
Bangkok, Thailand**

15 December 2006

Officer-in-Charge of Secretariat of UNESCAP, Barry Cable
Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Yongyuth Yuthawong
Deputy Governor, Dr. Wallop Suwandee,
Director of APWINC, Dr. Kio Chung Kim,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of business and professional women from over 80 member countries of BPW International, it is my pleasure to give an opening address at “APEC Forum on Digital Economy for Women 2006: Innovation and Leadership in Asia-Pacific”. This forum supports the aims of BPW, which is to “develop professional and leadership potentials for women at all levels”.

BPW International, Asia-Pacific Women Information Network Center (APWINC) and UNESCAP have collaborated and/or co-organize several events to support E-Business for Women in the past years. These include a jointed project which APWINC and BPW International co-formulate and received funding support from APEC Education Foundation to support business and professional women to attend Women Electronic Network Training (WENT) annually in Seoul, Korea. Such e-Business training curriculum was developed through funding from UNESCAP. Another event we co-organized was a seminar on “E-Business and Opportunities for Women in Asia-Pacific” at UNESCAP in March 2005. This year, I'm please that BPW International has an opportunity to co-organize this event, *“APEC Forum on Digital Economy for Women 2006: Innovation and Leadership in Asia-Pacific*.

Gender issues have been taken seriously by both United Nations and APEC. United Nations founded UN Commission on Status of Women since 1946. BPW International, under our formal name “International Federation of Business and Profession Women”, was instrumental in lobbying for the formation of CSW. Esther Hymer, the first chair of NGO Committee on Status of Women (NGO

CSW) was a BPW representative in the United Nations in New York. In 1997, Esther was named one of three most influential women to the UN Commission.

APEC began to address barriers to women's participation in business, the workforce, education and leadership since 1996. APEC adopts a Framework for the Integration of Women in 1999 and later turn Gender issue into a cross-cutting issue. This means every APEC projects must address the gender dimension. In 2002, Gender gains more ground when APEC Gender Focal Point Network (GFPN) was established to integrate gender considerations in APEC, to advance the Framework, to provide policy and practical advice on gender issues to APEC senior officials.

Another International body that also takes gender issue seriously is the World Economic Forum. World Economic Forum recently released "The Global Gender Gap Report 2006" which provides insight into economic, legal and social aspects of the gender gap. Thailand's Gender Gap ranks #40 among 115 countries world-wide and rank #5 in Asia and the Oceania.

Gender disaggregated data is vital to assess the degree of Gender Gap. One of the problems in understanding gender gap in Commerce is the lack of National gender-based statistics in Commerce. Without such statistics, many policy makers simply assume that there are no differences in the needs and the performance of women-owned and men-owned businesses. Policy makers must see that collecting and analyzing gender issue is not driven by the needs to give women more privileges, BUT to need to give policy makers insights on ways to promote women-led and men-led business in a more effective manner.

Why is this importance? It is importance because the "Return on Investment" on the effective ways to support the private sector is the improvement in the competitiveness of a country. World Economic Forum's "Global Competitiveness Report 2006-2007" ranks Thailand's competitiveness at #35 among 125 countries. A closer look at the sub-indexes of this ranking shows 3 priority areas, which are Technological readiness (Thailand ranks #48), higher education and training (Thailand ranks #42) and Business Sophistication (Thailand ranks #40). Technology, Education and Business Sophistication, to me, spell "*Training on E-Business*". Motivating both women and men to do e-Business can improve the country competitiveness. If women business owners are indeed much less incline to start e-Business than men, success in persuading them to pursue e-Business can significantly improve Thailand's Business Sophistication and the overall competitiveness of the country.

On this note, I wish this *APEC Forum on Digital Economy for Women 2006: Innovation and Leadership in Asia-Pacific* a great success.

Thank you.