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Korea Urged to Do More to Enhance Women's Status

By Na Jeong-ju
Staff Reporter

South Korea has made impressive efforts to improve women's rights and to give more business opportunities to women, but the country still has a lot to do in utilizing the capabilities of women, Irene Natividad, president of the Global Summit of Women, said on Wednesday.

“Changes don't happen naturally, without pressure,” Natividad told The Korea Times in an interview on the eve of the summit's opening in Seoul.

“Women should create pressure for themselves to make the changes. South Korean women are treated better than those in many other countries, but women here must push harder to face difficulties squarely.”

Natividad, an advocate of establishing a global network of women leaders, arrived here on Sunday to preside over the annual summit, which will focus on finding ways of increasing women's role in the world economy.

The Global Summit of Women 2004 opens at the Lotte Hotel in Sogong-dong in central Seoul for a three-day run, with some 800 prominent women leaders from 84 countries in politics, economy, non-governmental organizations and other sectors attending.

“Prominent women leaders have come here from all over the world to exchange their ideas. I want this meeting to be a marketplace for a lot of ideas on how to increase women's economic opportunities and activities,” she said.

Comparing her first visit to South Korea in the early 1990s with now, she said South Korea has undergone a major change in promoting women's rights by engaging much more in the issue.

“Seoul has changed a lot in a very short period of time, not just technologically, but in the way they care about women,” the 56-year-old said. “I'm really proud of that. I want to encourage South Korean government and administrators to keep up their efforts.”

Describing women as an “untapped potential,” she said 40 percent of the global workforce are women and they keep expanding their role in the economy and politics, but changes are very slow.



Irene Natividad

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Regarding the ways to alleviate poverty, Natividad said she wants to help micro-entrepreneurs through this summit.

``I want to help tiny companies led by women to get access to e-commerce, creative ways of financing and other solutions so that women's economic activities can be increased,i-i she said.

A native of the Philippines, Natividad wears many hats. She is the president of the summit, an annual international gathering of women leaders from around the world, and co-chairs Corporate Women Directors International, which promotes the increased participation of women on corporate boards globally. In addition, she is serving as executive director of the Philippine American Foundation.

Natividad's commitment to promoting women stems from her long involvement with the National Women's Political Caucus in the United States, a 30-year-old bipartisan organization dedicated to electing and appointing more women to public offices. Widely recognized for her outstanding leadership of the caucus, she was elected president in 1985 and re-elected in 1987, the first Asian American ever to head a national political organization.

``I want to advocate women's rights and that's how I define myself. It's my personal passion,i-i said Natividad, who has chaired the summit gathering for the past 14 years. ``I want to bring women leaders around the world together and solve problems faced by women. This summit will be a lot of help in solving problems.i-i

The next summit will be held in Mexico in 2005. Organizers said Mexico sent the largest delegation of 22 members to benchmark this year's summit.

jj@koreatimes.co.kr

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