

INWES-APNN 2018 CONFERENCE

WOMEN ENGINEERS SECTION

reported by



Ir. Mah Siew Kien



Group photo session

The 8th annual meeting of the International Network of Women Engineers and Scientists-Asia and Pacific Nation Network (INWES-APNN) was held on October 18 - 20 at The Centre for Women & Development (CWD) in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Established in 2011, INWES is a global network of organisations for women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and a UNESCO partner. The event, jointly organised by the Vietnam Women's Union and the Vietnam Association for Intellectual Women (VAFIW), gathered Vietnamese women and women delegates from other countries in the Asian-Pacific region.

Ir. Mah Siew Kien, Chairman of Women Engineers Section, IEM, presented Malaysia's country report which

outlined activities conducted throughout the year, from STEM initiatives targeted at school children to women in leadership. Dr Marcella Lucas, CEO of LeadWomen (based in Malaysia) shared The Malaysian Journey of Women on Boards, in her presentation as an invited speaker. In Malaysia, women hold 15% of board seats on a total of 924 public-listed companies as at Q2, 2018.

A meeting was held among representatives of INWES-APNN countries to discuss current issues and the way forward. It was announced that Mongolia had won the bid to be the 4th Chair of INWES-APNN, from 2020 to 2023.

In the afternoon, delegates visited the Women Museum and Painting Exhibition which highlighted the role Vietnamese women played in their country's history



Delegates at the Conference

and would continue to play. The first day ended with a gala dinner where members of APNN countries gave spectacular performances.

On the second day, delegates were treated to three parallel panels focusing on three themes: Gender & Gender Equality in Science and Technology, Nutrition & Food Safety and Disaster Risk Management & Climate Change Adaptation. Ir. Prof. Dr Leong Wai Yie, from Malaysia co-chaired the gender equality track with Prof. Dr Nyugen Thi Doan, the Honorable President of VAFIW and former Vice-President of The Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Delegates on the gender equality track were told that most countries had not achieved gender equality in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Globally, women accounted for less than 30% of total science researchers but this number does not match women's potential in science and technology. In Asia, only 15% of science researchers are female. India has the lowest ratio, with only 10%, while The Philippines and Myanmar have high percentages of 55% and 85% respectively. According to Nguyễn Thị Bích Loan, Vice Rector of Commerce University, Vietnamese women had strengthened their position in society. The percentage of women acting as National Assembly deputies was 26.72 per cent, which was higher than the global average of 22.3 per cent. Favourable

conditions that removed barriers to allow women to reach their full potential should be put in place.

The delegates agreed that there should be more opportunities to share experiences on gender equality, especially in science and technology and emphasised the need to understand the challenges in increasing gender equity in the field.

Other workshops held addressed disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and food safety. Climate change affected every aspect of life, including the environment, security, food safety, the economy and culture. The delegates reiterated the responsibilities of individuals and businesses in playing a critical role in reducing the impact of climate change.

A Hanoi Declaration adopted on 19 October, outlined the commitment of APNN members towards strengthening cooperation and coordination between female scientists and engineers in the region to support the growth of the region and as a commitment to United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). The declaration acknowledged the importance of female scientists in sustainable growth and the development of economies during the 4th Industrial Revolution, as well as the necessity to narrow the gender gap in science and technology.

On the last day, a technical visit to Trang An, a UNESCO world heritage site located south of Hanoi, had been arranged for the delegates. However, sometimes even the

best laid plan has to be changed. Due to unexpected bad weather, the delegates were brought instead to the Bai Dinh Pagoda in Ba Rau hills, near the Hoang Long River. This is Southeast Asia's largest Buddhist complex, comprising several temples and over 500 intricately carved statues of Buddha. At Ninh Binh Province, the delegates were treated to luncheon hosted by the Chairman of the People's Committee of Ninh Binh Province.

The INWES-APNN delegates showed their strong commitment and concerted efforts towards making the INWES-APNN conference a unique event. They are now looking forward to the INWES-APNN 2019 meeting in Nepal next year. INWES-APNN countries are dedicated to implementing activities focused on supporting the strategic objective of gender equality. ■



Dr Marcella Lucas (LeadWomen & 30% Club Malaysia Chapter), Ir. Mah (IEM) and Ir. Prof. Dr Leong (IEM) of Malaysia