

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4930

Wee, Hean Bee

(1946 -)

Born 23 March, 1946, Penang Malaysia

Occupation Community worker, Educator, Women's rights activist, Women's rights organiser

Summary

Hean Bee Wee was president of the National Council of Women of Australia from 2006 to 2009 (the first Asian-born woman to hold the position) and a vice-president of the International Council of Women from 2012. She brought to both positions a passionate commitment to gender and ethnic equality, first learned in her birthplace, Penang, and developed through voluntary work undertaken in South Australia. Her work for NCWA and ICW also benefitted from Wee's professional expertise in business and international education.

Details

Hean Bee Wee was born in Penang, Malaysia, on 23 March 1946, daughter of Gan Chin Huat and his wife, Khoo Hong Sean. After completing her secondary education, she came to Australia to study economics at the University of Adelaide. On graduating as a Bachelor of Economics (Honours) in 1969, she chose to become a secondary school teacher specialising in business education. She married a fellow teacher, Victor Wee, in Adelaide in 1970. In 1973, she completed a Diploma of Education at the University of Adelaide and, in 2003, an Advanced Diploma of Financial Services at the University of Technology Sydney. Within her teaching career, she developed further expertise in international education, teaching and co-ordinating International Baccalaureate programs and becoming an ambassador for South Australian schools in Southeast Asia.

Wee is passionately committed to the principle of social equality, in terms of both gender and ethnicity. Growing up in a society where girls were valued less than boys, she became aware of gender inequity at an early age. When she was 11 years old, her best friend told her that she would have to leave school because her parents could not afford to pay for her to sit the entrance examination to secondary school, preferring to save the money to pay for her younger brother's examination the following year. Hean Bee Wee was horrified, and paid the examination fees from her own savings.

In Australia, Wee carried her passion for equality into a range of voluntary activities. In 1991, she joined the City Group of the Penguin Club of South Australia, initially to develop her skills as a public speaker. Wishing to share these benefits, she set about recruiting other women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds to join the club, with considerable success. The same drive for equality led her to become a delegate for the Penguin Club to the National Council of Women of South Australia. She also joined the South Australian branch of the Asian Pacific Business Council for Women, serving on the executive in 1994-1995 and 1998-1999. From 1995 to 1997, she took on the position of commissioner for the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, and, from 1999-2003, she served as president of the Asian Women's Consultative Council of South Australia. She has also served as treasurer of the South Australian Women's Trust from 1999 to 2002. Her work on behalf of Asian and Non-English Speaking Women is ongoing.

Within the National Council of Women SA, Hean Bee Wee soon undertook executive roles. From 2002 to 2004, she was economics adviser to the South Australian Executive and, from 2004 to 2006, vice-president. In 2006, she was elected president of the National Council of Women of Australia, representing the ACT Council and serving until 2009. Her proudest achievement as NCWA president was to obtain funding from the federal government for 2 projects, both directed to the advancement of women. The first of these worked to promote the well-being of Aboriginal women in Oodnadatta, the second to provide a culturally and linguistically appropriate leadership training course for Non-English Speaking women at TAFE; both have had successful outcomes.

Hean Bee Wee has carried these concerns for education and equity into the international arena. In 2012, she was elected a vice-president of the International Council of Women, with responsibility for supervising a project in Samoa to establish a financially viable marketing structure for handicrafts produced by local Samoan women—a project bringing together the full range of her expertise and commitment.

Hean Bee Wee is also the proud mother of Samuel and grandmother of 2, Sebastian and Annabel.

Events

2012 -

International Council of Women

1991 - 2012

Penguins Club of South Australia

1994 - 1999

Asian-Pacific Business Council for Women (SA)

1999 - 2002

South Australian Women's Trust

1999 - 2003

Asian Women's Consultative Council of South Australia

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Stirrers with Style! Presidents of the National Council of Women of Australia and its predecessors, National Council of Women of Australia, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ncwa>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

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Digital resources



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