

There are no restrictions in law or practice on participation by women and members of minorities in politics. However, women are underrepresented in government and politics. Despite this, Filipino women are actively participating in nation-building through other venues such as in civil society organizations and other social movements.

The assumption to power of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who was sworn in as the country's 14<sup>th</sup> chief executive after her predecessor was declared unfit to rule due to numerous resignations in his Cabinet, brings forth renewed and invigorated efforts of women in the country's political processes.

At the forefront of the struggle for the removal from office of Mr. Joseph Ejercito Estrada is former president Corazon Aquino, who continues to be the country's symbol for democracy and freedom. Aside from Ms. Aquino, there were several women civil society leaders who led opposition organizations during the 2001 popular uprising. These women marched on the streets, facilitated multi-sectoral meetings, negotiated with the opposing camps and talked with the defecting generals.

These same women of the civil society have worked for the passage of such landmark laws such as the 1995 Anti-Sexual Harassment Law and the 1997 Anti-Rape Law. The Women in Development and Nation Building Act of 1992 states that a given percentage of official development assistance must be allocated for gender and women's concerns—a principle that has extended to Philippine government budgetary resources.

Ms. Macapagal-Arroyo appointed four women in her Cabinet holding sensitive and critical posts such as Departments of Budget and Management; Labor and Employment; Science and Technology; and Social Welfare and Development. Other important posts headed by women in the Arroyo government are the Civil Service Commission, National Anti-Poverty Commission and the Presidential Management Staff.

There are three women elected to the 22-member Senate or Upper House and 33 women in the 204-member House of Representatives. Three of the 15 members of the Supreme Court are women.

In local governments, 14 women are elected as provincial chief executives while 132 women out of 1635 municipalities and cities are elected as municipal or city chief executives.

Abanse Pinay!, an all-women's party, participated in the 1998 legislative elections through the party-list system and won a seat. During its stint at the Congress, the party pushed for pro-women legislations such as the following: "The Anti-Trafficking of Persons Especially Women and Minors Act," "Solo Parents Welfare Act" and the Act Amending Articles 96, 124, 211 and 225 of the Family Code. It also authored eight bills and four resolutions such as the Anti-Domestic Violence bill, a bill amending the Sexual Harassment Law expanding its coverage and an Act to promote breastfeeding in the Philippines by establishing and maintaining lactation stations, providing breastfeeding breaks, including breastfeeding in the education curricula.

In law but not always in practice, women have most of the rights and protections accorded to men. The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women seeks to coordinate programs for women, working closely with NGO's such as the 10 million-member Presidential Council of Women in the Philippines. More women than men enter secondary and tertiary education. Unemployment rates for women are consistently higher than for men. Women's salaries averaged about 47 percent lower than their male counterparts'. Except for government service and jobs in government-owned or government-controlled corporations, women continued to face discrimination in employment.

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, remains a serious societal problem. Rape is illegal and in certain cases punishable by death. Spousal rape and abuse also are illegal, but enforcement is ineffective. Women's advocates cite the lack of laws on domestic violence, double standards of morality, and a traditional societal reluctance to discuss private family affairs as some of the reasons for domestic violence. The absence of divorce under the law and limited job opportunities combine to limit the ability of both poor and wealthy women to escape destructive relationships.

The PNP and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) both maintain women's help desks to assist victims of violence against women and to encourage the reporting of crimes. Their role was strengthened further by then Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who until October 12 served concurrently as the secretary of the DSWD and continued to give women's issues a high public profile during the year. Many PNP stations included female officers. With the assistance of NGO's, additional male officers received gender sensitivity training to deal with victims of sexual crimes and domestic violence.

In October a regional trial court in Davao City handed down the country's first conviction for marital rape. Rape continued to be a major problem; the number of rape cases reported to the police has risen by about 16 percent annually since 1992. The PNP reported that it investigated 3,145 cases of rape during the year; most of the alleged perpetrators were arrested. However, some women's groups stated that courts' imposition of death sentences for rape convictions might inhibit some victims from pressing charges. The number of prisoners awaiting execution for rape exceeds the number awaiting execution for murder.

Many women suffer exposure to violence through their recruitment, often through deception, into prostitution. Although illegal, prostitution remains widespread. A 1998 International Labor Organization (ILO) study estimated that 500,000 women are engaged in prostitution within the country. Most work independently or in small brothels rather than in prominent "entertainment clubs." Penalties for the offense are light, but detained prostitutes are subjected to administrative indignities. There were reports of forced prostitution of children. The Antivagrancy Act often is used by police officers as a pretext to extort money from prostitutes; those unable to pay may be subjected to sexual abuse. Hotel and travel industry leaders continued to refuse to honor their pledges to cooperate with a code endorsed by international tourism groups to stop sex tourism.

Local officials condone a climate of impunity for those who exploit prostitutes—both the "entertainment club" owners and their patrons. Highly publicized official campaigns to close clubs and brothels fail to rescue young women from the abuse because the offending establishments usually are back in business a few days after such raids. The penalties for such actions are not considered sufficient to deter those who exploit prostitutes.

The DSWD continued to provide temporary shelter and counseling to women trapped in prostitution, but officials believe that this helped only a small number of victims of illicit recruitment. DSWD officials noted that the number rescued failed to reflect the true extent of the prostitution problem since it reflected only those who obtained temporary shelter and counseling through the DSWD and local governments. NGO's argue that the Government first should address the abuses of dislocation and homelessness in order to address effectively the problem of women's exposure to the structural violence inherent in prostitution.

Trafficking in women and children for forced prostitution and forced labor are problems.

Sexual harassment in the workplace also continues to be a problem. It is thought to be widespread yet underreported due to victims' fear of losing their jobs. Harassment by managers in "special economic zones" (SEZ's) is thought to be a common practice. Most of the female employees in SEZ's are economic migrants who are required to work long hours and have no independent workers organization to assist with filing complaints. Women also are hired as contractual employees without benefits in the pressing and sewing industry. Many are subjected to long hours in inadequately ventilated facilities.

In this predominantly Roman Catholic nation, Church opposition to divorce is strong. Nonetheless, changes in the legal code have made marriage annulment fairly easy and increasingly common. However, the legal cost precluded this option for many women. The practice of "unofficial divorce" (permanent separation) was common among lower-income couples. In such cases, the wife usually is left with the children, and the husband provides little or no financial support 🚫