

BURMA

First Women's Forum Kicks Off in Rangoon

By ZARNI MANN / THE IRRAWADDY | Friday, December 6, 2013 |

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Aung San Suu Kyi delivers an opening speech at Burma's first Women's Forum on Friday. (Photo: Jpaing / ...)

s first women's forum on Friday morning. I'll bring together women from various countries to discuss the role of women in a rapidly changing society.

Women's activists, women journalists from Burma and across the world joined the forum, where opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi gave an opening speech.

Suu Kyi said women had an important role to play in peace-building and socio-economic development of Burmese society, which is quickly opening up due to political reforms and emerging from decades of

ethnic conflict.

"Women, I believe, have a great role to play in building a culture," said Suu Kyi, adding that women should help foster new attitudes in Burmese society.

"It takes time to change a culture, a mindset," the Nobel Laureate said. "Our women have to understand that their role is to build a new culture and to me one of the most important things that the women of this country can do, and our friends and supporters can help change, is our own attitude."

She added that it was equally important that traditional attitudes change and become more progressive towards women and girls.

Organized with support of the French Embassy and the Paris-based Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, the event includes speeches, panel discussions and workshops on women's roles in Burma's "fast-opening society."

Speakers on Friday included French Ambassador Thierry Mathou, Burma's Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Myat Myat Ohn Khin, Thet Thet Khine, vice-president of the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association and K.H. Wang, executive director of Smart Reader Worldwide, a Malaysian-based child education organization.

Panel discussions on Friday morning focused on "nurturing women's entrepreneurship" and "new paths for the young and the lost generation."

K.H. Wang said during one of the discussions that, "This is a very good platform for women to get together. And participants here will be able to share their points of view, their experiences and important and encouraging views of the speakers."

"It should also be done in ASEAN and in the other Asian countries," she added.

Other discussion and workshop issues during the event include women's roles in driving growth in emerging markets and promoting responsible international investment, freedom of expression and women's health.

Prominent French speakers scheduled to share their views include Minister of Culture and Communication Aurélie Filippetti, International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Christine Lagarde and Christophe de Margerie, the CEO of French energy giant Total.

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