Providing Women and Children with a Haven of Peace

*Juror training for domestic violence and divorce cases in Wuhan, China*

100 Projects for Peace Proposal

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**Background**

During the last decade in China, domestic violence and divorce cases have gradually increased, making up more than 50% of all the civil cases in total. With conventional beliefs entrenched in their minds, Chinese women who fall victim to domestic violence or seek divorce, rarely stand up for their rights in public. Therefore a trained jury would not only ensure women and children’s protection today but for generations to come.

In China, male judges dominate the court and they usually approach the case from a standpoint different from women. This causes the scales of justice to tip towards the men in the courtroom, and women and children may be unfairly treated in this situation.

Jury selection in China differs radically from that in the United States. While the U.S. picks its jury pool at random, Chinese jurors are selected from the local courts, who tend to select well-educated people from decent backgrounds. Currently, juries are not required to go to a trial court, but as a new policy they are encouraged to by the Chinese government.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to prepare 20 jurors for domestic violence and divorce cases for the Supreme Court of Wuhan in Wuhan, China. Through training these volunteers will be able to critically analyze cases from a female’s perspective, and help judges make a more informed ruling. These 20 volunteers, who complete the training will serve as jurors for these cases; their sensitivity towards issues women and children face will give better balance in the court. In addition, they will also influence society by passing on their knowledge about women’s issues in domestic violence and divorce cases.

**Preparation**

The Hubei Provincial Women’s Association has been holding the Women’s Festival on the International Working Women's Day, also known as the U.N. Day for Women's Rights and International Peace, on March 8th for two decades. On March 8th, 2008, an event on public awareness of women’s rights and benefits in domestic violence and divorce cases will take place in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in China. During the event, recruitment will be set up in several communities looking for volunteers who want to serve as domestic violence and divorce case jurors. Attorneys
from Wuhan Women and Children’s Legal Assistance Center, as well as members from women’s associations, will be invited to provide free counseling to the public on domestic violence and divorce cases.

When I arrive in Wuhan in May, I will start recruiting jury volunteers from local women’s associations and universities. Candidates who are without criminal record, 23 years old and above, and who have a B.A. (B.S.) or higher education will be considered eligible.¹

By the end of June, a list of volunteers, training dates and locations will be finalized, and specialists will come to give lectures according to the schedule.

**Goals**

The goals of the training program are:

- **To teach volunteers basic knowledge of Chinese law.** Lawyers and court staff will give brief introductions on court procedures.

- **To raise consciousness of women’s issues among potential jurors.** Through lectures taught by women studies sociologists, volunteers will have a deeper understanding of gender differences, women’s unique social roles and needs.

- **To study domestic violence and divorce cases,** the focus being child custody and distribution of property, which are the centers of dispute in most cases.

- **To develop the ability of critical thinking and questioning.** Scenarios will be discussed under instructions from experienced lawyers and law school professors. Volunteers are expected to be able to analyze a case critically and to question constructively, instead of simply auditing.

People who will give lectures are professors from the Wuhan University and Beijing University Law School, women studies sociologists, attorneys from Wuhan Women and Children’s Legal Assistance Center, staff from Wuhan Supreme Court, and volunteers from Hubei Provincial Women’s Association (non-governmental organization) and the Department for Rights and Benefits (governmental). Invitations will be sent out in the first week of June.

**Personal Background**

As a participant in Agnes Scott College Project for Peace 2007, *Fighting Domestic Violence Creating Domestic Peace*, I have acquired an aggressive attitude towards fighting violence and injustice. Our successful project has enriched my experience in this area, and prepared me for more challenging tasks in the future. In China, I have also gained experience from several training sessions in helping women suffering from domestic violence. Working in the Department for Rights and Benefits for over two decades, my mother is always encouraging me to work for public service. Her connections within the judicial area will ensure the success of this project.

The goal of this project is to make a positive impact on the lives of women and children in Wuhan, China by ensuring them a fair day in court.

¹ Required by law in China.