

# Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations



*Presidents of the 9 participating colleges and universities from left to right: Harashima – Japan, Badre – Beirut, Koh – Korea, Balreddy – India, Kim – Korea, Somasekhar – India, Singh – India, Phailbus – Pakistan, Heisey – Iran.*

Vision, activity and willingness to give, these qualities prepared Mrs. Tai-Young Lee for the creation of the Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations in 1956.

Seeing the need of Korean women for legal advice in their society which is predominantly male-oriented, she went back to school at the age of thirty or more, studied law and organized the Legal Aid Center, of which she was sole counselor, in a small office located in downtown Seoul. By 1976, the staff had grown to a total of 16, including 7 counselors who are law graduates, clerical workers, a librarian, a researcher and other support staff. At the end of 1976, the Center moved into its new 6-story building on Yoi-Island in Seoul. The building was made possible through the dedicated work and giving of many friends, and especially by 100 Korean women in

Korea and abroad, (each donor—\$ 1000), for whom the building is named.

### Main Activities of the Center

1. Daily legal counseling service for women and men. Average number of cases per day (1976): 40–50. Most common civil case: divorce.
2. A mobile unit which can take the center facilities to villages and other areas where women would otherwise have no access to legal counseling.
3. A library which is rapidly growing into a repository of books, periodicals, newspapers related to women's rights and legal issues.
4. Clinical training for women college students from the Law School of Ewha Womans University.
5. Development of a research center of the women's movement in

Korea and around the world, with an effort made to collect information on the status and legal rights of women.

6. Special lectures, programs and provisions of various opportunities for continuing education for women of all ages.

7. Work toward amending present laws and initiating new laws which protect and improve the legal rights of Korean women.

8. Visitation to young women and young men juvenile delinquents in various centers in the Seoul area.

9. Use of the mass media more widely to provide counseling and to share issues related to the women's movement.

This center, the first and only such center in Korea, became a member of the Korea Association of Women's Organization in 1966, and of the International Legal Aid Association in 1970.

## female circumcision and infibulation

According to WIN NEWS, "Women's International Network", Vol. 4, No. 2, 1978, p. 43-44, female circumcision in its various forms is traditionally practised on young girls in some 26 countries of Africa and Asia. "Besides its psychological aspects, the effects of this genital excision, except in its mildest form, result in severe health hazards, both at the time of the operation when the girl is young and later on during a woman's childbearing years. Infection, urinary retention, damage to the urethra, keloid form-

ation and cysts, are only a few of the documented dangers. Infertility can also result."

"Another form of oppression which women are subjected to, in Somalia, Kenya and Sudan is infibulation, which means the closing up of the labia (lips of the vagina) of a girl, done to ensure her virginity. The labia are sewn shut at puberty and opened forcibly at marriage. A woman undergoes the risk and pain of the process whenever the husband goes

**"A violation of human rights. Both have detrimental effects on the health of women and children."**

away, to prevent her infidelity."

This custom reduces the woman to a mere tool for a man's pleasure, with no right over her body. The gynaecologist we spoke to, said that operations are often performed on infibulation cases and that further complications occur at childbirth. In some extreme cases, the women need caesarian operations because their birth canals are too constricted with scar tissue after infibulation and are beyond repair."