

More women should head S'pore universities, organisations: Ex-MP

Ng Wei Kai

The Straits Times, 16 January 2023

SINGAPORE - There should be more women leading Singapore's universities and other organisations, said former MP and academic Intan Azura Mokhtar.

Speaking at a panel discussion titled The New Social Compact And Policy Implications For Work, Dr Intan, an associate professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology, said: "In our six autonomous universities, there is only one female university president..."

"What about other female academics we have? They are competent and capable, but why do we not have them in the senior management of our universities?"

The only woman heading an autonomous university in Singapore is Professor Lily Kong, who is the president of Singapore Management University.

Dr Intan added that men also dominate board seats as well as senior management and leadership positions in organisations, and this was something that Singapore should look at changing.

The panel discussion was part of the Singapore Perspectives 2023 conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and moderated by its deputy director for research and senior research fellow, Dr Gillian Koh.

The other panel speakers were NTUC director and MP Yeo Wan Ling, and consultancy firm Stewardship Asia Centre's chief executive officer, Mr Rajeev Peshawaria.

It was held at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre on Monday.

One way to get disadvantaged groups into leadership positions is to nurture what Dr Intan calls an inclusive and representative meritocracy.

She said: "Meritocracy is a principle that creates fair opportunities for all, but there is also evidence that it can entrench privilege and inequality."

She added that rewarding people based on their academic achievements alone can unintentionally reward them for their circumstances, such as their social connections and capital.

A meritocracy which is inclusive and representative should look past previous academic achievement and embrace diversity, as well as look at the circumstances that people have lived through which may have diminished their opportunities, she said.

Replying to a question from the audience about whether government scholarships, such as the prestigious Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarships, should review their selection processes to be more inclusive, Dr Intan and Ms Yeo said the PSC has come a long way and now offers scholarships to candidates from a wider section of academic backgrounds.