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### Migrant worker lawmaker adapts to China's legislative life

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#### Special Report: NPC, CPPCC Annual Sessions 2008

BEIJING, March 2 (Xinhua) -- Hu Xiaoyan will enter Beijing's Great Hall of the People for the first time in her life, not as a tourist, but as a lawmaker to attend the annual parliament session scheduled to open on Wednesday.

"I feel the whole world is watching me. The pressure is really too much," said Hu, 34, a migrant worker in south China's Guangdong Province. She arrived in the capital on Sunday.

Hu is one of the three migrant workers who were elected as deputies to the National People's Congress, or the top legislature, for the first time. The other two are from China's largest metropolis of Shanghai and Chongqing Municipality in the southwest, both of which have a huge number of migrant workers.

A native of southwestern Sichuan Province, Hu has been working in a building ceramics company in Foshan City, Guangdong, for five years.

She had been promoted to deputy workshop chief. Most of the workers in her company are migrant workers.

Hu was one of two candidates selected by Guangdong trade unions and was elected to the post on Jan. 21 at a session of the provincial legislature.

She has kept her job, but her free time is often occupied by her new post. She foregoes her two-hour midday nap and often stays up late to collect requests and suggestions of fellow migrant workers. She opened a blog and her constituents can e-mail her. Interview requests from journalists from home and abroad swarm in every day.

She has even held a press conference and conducted a number of surveys to learn more about her fellow workers.

Hu says she is working hard to be a true "spokesperson for migrant workers" and does not want to be a media celebrity.

#### Two Proposals

Hu, with only a middle school education, has been struggling to write her proposals to the congress.

She has stayed up late many times to revise her two proposals, says her husband, Liu Jiaming, who works in the same company.

"I turned to many former deputies for help with the revision. This is the third version," says Hu, pointing to the copy.

Her first proposal asks that the government help migrant workers integrate with the social environment where they work.

The incomes of migrant workers should continue to be raised and more security is needed for women workers, she suggests.

Her second proposal for the congress asks the government to take more care of the children of migrant workers who are left behind in rural villages and towns, often staying at home without parental care.

The government should survey and register the children and open hotlines to provide convenient contact with their parents, Hu proposes.

"I have twin girls studying in my hometown, I hope they can live a happy life." Hu says.

Symbolic And Significant

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Hu, with the other two migrant worker deputies -- Kang Houming from Chongqing and Zhu Xueqin from Shanghai -- will start the first session of the 11th National People's Congress on Wednesday. They will be the focus of almost 3,000 deputies.

A huge and important group in society, migrant workers have their own distinctive demands, says Tang Jun, a social policy researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Their deputies will directly express their needs as they have personal experience and better communication with fellow migrants, Tang said.

"It is of great symbolic and real significance in political democracy for migrant worker deputies to take their place in the country's top legislative body and participate in politics," says Xu Yaotong, professor of politics at the National School of Administration in Beijing.

But only three deputies cannot represent them all, Xu says. "The number should increase and their abilities to fulfil new duties should grow."

To be an NPC deputy is "a very tough job", Hu admits, "but I will try my best to be a good one."

She will learn to handle things from other deputies at the congress which lasts about two weeks.

#### Background

China's migrant laborers from rural areas are estimated to number around 1.5 million. They have become a pillar of the country's work force, but they face various problems, including pay arrears, workplace injury compensation, health care and their children's schooling.

The NPC annual session in March last year approved a draft resolution on legislative elections. The resolution stipulated that provinces and municipalities with a large population of rural migrant workers should have an NPC deputy quota for them.

Migrant workers have previously held positions in provincial and city-level legislative bodies. They have become more involved in the development of the regions where they work.

Guangdong has around 20 million migrant workers. In November, six migrant workers were elected to the provincial legislature.



Editor: Gao Ying

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