

Alaas Khotun: Association of Rural Women of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

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The public women's organization Alaas Khotun represents the interests of women who live in the rural and, especially, agricultural areas, of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), which is located in north-eastern Siberia, Russia. It especially strives for the advancement of women who are interested in achieving the consolidation of their personal power, knowledge and skills that make them employable in the contemporary labour market of Russia. So, too, does it seek to promote their abilities in relation to the social and political life of the Republic.

The executive organ of the Alaas Khotun organization is the consultative forum known as the *Il Khotun* (Yakut for "Rural Parliament"). The aims of the organization are to enhance the contributions of women to multilateral and distinctive activities, and to overcome the difficulties associated with raising one's family in the republic's rural regions and with the difficulties associated with the period of transition that Russia is currently experiencing towards a new open market economy. This is especially important, since rural women in Russia tend to face greater challenges (economically and socially) than do rural women in other parts of the Circumpolar North.

There are several fundamental directions of the organization. First, the leaders of the organization take part in community and social activities with the

aim of promoting the position of women as house-wives, mothers, as employees and specialists working in the public (governmental) and private sectors, as well as the not-for-profit (non-commercial) community-oriented sector, which is known as the “third sector” in Russia. Apart from the participation of the organization’s leaders in such activities, we also encourage our members to take an active role in each of these fields.

Another priority area of Alaas Khotun is the promotion of friendship between its members and mutual collaboration with other organizations, both within and between the different regions that comprise the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). This region, itself, is one-and-a-half times the size of the State of Alaska, just to give you an idea of the expanse that our organization is dealing with. Our organization has members in over half of the 33 regions of our republic, which is a fair achievement since many of the most northerly regions cannot be considered agricultural by the usual definition of the term.

Our association is also concerned with new opportunities for receiving instruction, whether it be in the form of formal education or training, or whether it be the learning experience that results from the exchange of experience and knowledge amongst our members or else between our members and specialists in certain fields of knowledge that may be important to the women that comprise our organization.

Concerned about the changing tendencies in employment needs within Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is also important for Alaas Khotun to provide its members with some direction concerning the trade-oriented, commercial, open market economy that is developing in our country. This is a challenge for any organization, and especially for a volunteer one, in a rapidly changing country such as our own.

Our leaders try to participate as much as possible in the drafting and amending of legislative and executive acts of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) in

order to attract interest of the government's policy- and decision-makers to the issues and problems that are faced by the inhabitants, and especially women, of rural regions within the republic. Apart from the social, employment, and other problems with which this organization is concerned, Alaas Khotun is also interested in the protection of the natural environment of the republic. This includes the lakes, forests, rivers, and other landmarks, which are being threatened by pollution and other factors that contribute negatively to the environmental health of the region's population.

It should be noted that the members, whether they be ordinary members or the most active of leaders within the organization, consist of women who are primarily involved in the organization on a voluntary basis. We would hope to exchange information or perhaps even collaborate with like-minded women and organizations in other parts of the Circumpolar North, particularly given the positive feedback that our organization has received during the Circumpolar Women's Conference. Especially in Russia, access to information, knowledge, and expertise in such a manner can only serve to advance the position of women, and especially rural women, in society.

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