

Turning Promises into Progress

Statement of the Linkage Caucus¹ From the 49th Session of the CSW
March 11, 2005

Thousands of advocates for women's rights from all over the world who gathered at the United Nations for the past two weeks successfully gained full and unequivocal reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in a Political Declaration adopted March 4th. Women came in record numbers to the ten-year review of the Platform at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Government ministers from more than eighty countries spoke, reflecting the global importance of gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights.

In addition to the focus on the inter-governmental process, thousands of women gathered in several hundred NGO side events to share successful practices, analyze gains and losses during the decade, and strategize the way forward. The vitality of how women are working to implement the Beijing Platform at all levels – from local to global – was best reflected in these events. The diversity of women represented—women from every region of the world, and young women, in particular—also demonstrated the strength of the global women's movement.

Working together, governments and women's rights advocates rallied to defend the human rights of women and to reaffirm the Beijing Platform despite opposition from the United States. The U.S. government initially refused to unequivocally reaffirm the Platform by offering an amendment that not only threatened consensus but also attempted to undermine the human rights underpinning of the Platform. The U.S. stood alone as every other government refused to bend to its intense pressure.

In addition, 10 resolutions adopted at the CSW covered the following: Gender Mainstreaming, HIV/AIDS, Women in Afghanistan, Women in Palestine, Indigenous Women, Women and Natural Disasters, INSTRAW, Economic Advancement of Women, Trafficking, and a proposal to consider in 2006 appointing a Special Rapporteur on Laws that Discriminate Against Women. Many of these cover areas of great concern to women that are often addressed by the CSW. The resolutions on Indigenous Women and on Women and Natural Disasters, however, are new and represent important gains based on organizing done by women on these issues.

The Economic Advancement and Trafficking resolutions, while covering important topics, were introduced and used by the US to continue to try to impose their narrow perspectives and to undermine aspects of the Beijing Platform. Because many governments rejected parts of the U.S. approach, the trafficking resolution eventually passed in a modified form. On Economic Advancement, the resolution introduced by the US that had focused narrowly on entrepreneurship was successfully expanded by other countries to address the feminization of poverty, the role of the public sector, and the link between reproductive rights and economic independence. As a result the US withdrew its sponsorship but the resolution was still adopted.

The Political Declaration establishes a strong link between the Platform and the Millennium Declaration, the subject of a five-year UN review in September 2005. Throughout the CSW, governments recognized that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the time bound targets

¹ The Linkage Caucus was convened by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO).

for eradicating poverty and implementing the Millennium Declaration, cannot be achieved without advancing the human rights and empowerment of all women in all their diversity.

The UN Secretary General, in his statement at the CSW, highlighted the seven strategic priorities proposed in the MDG Task Force on Gender Equality, and affirmed the critical importance of taking focused action on:

- Expanding efforts to combat violence against girls and women.
- Guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Guaranteeing women's and girls' property, land and inheritance rights
- Eliminating gender inequality in employment, such as eliminating the earnings gap
- Increasing the number of women in national and local governments
- Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women's and girls' time burdens, so that, for example, the amount of time women spend on gathering fuel, water, and other basic necessities is drastically reduce
- Expanding girls' access to education, secondary as well as primary

These are a good start that all governments should be urged to support along with the Beijing Platform as critical to the MDGS and the coming Millennium Summit. However, paper commitments alone are not enough; sufficient resources must be made available to achieve these goals in a timely manner.

The Millennium review summit in September presents an important forum for governments to advance women's rights and gender equality. The forward momentum of women's equality must also be carried into the World Summit on an Information Society (WSIS) II in 2005. Furthermore, proposals to reform the UN must reflect gender perspectives, and action taken on UN reform must include women as decision-makers. The UN, in its institutional structure, must reflect a greater commitment to gender equality. Therefore, it is critical to increase funding for and the status of the women-specific units of the UN, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and the CEDAW treaty monitoring committee.

The purpose of a stronger UN is to promote peace, security, human rights, and sustainable development, issues of critical importance to women as well as men. None of these goals can be achieved without women's equality. In addition to the Beijing Platform, other documents and their interpretations, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and all human rights treaties as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, provide guidance on how to address the linkages between gender equality, development, human rights and peace.

We call on governments and the UN to include civil society representatives, especially women's organizations as equal participants in the UN reform process and the Millennium Summit. Furthermore, we call on governments to demonstrate political will immediately by taking concrete actions to implement the Beijing Platform and reporting their progress on these actions at the Millennium Summit in September.

No more empty promises: the time for action is now!