



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING TO
REVIEW REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM
FOR ACTION AND ITS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OUTCOMES**

Bangkok, 7-10 September 2004

CONTENTS

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Background

1. The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes was held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, from 7 to 10 September 2004.
2. The Meeting was convened pursuant to a decision by the Commission at its fifty-seventh session in 2001 to review the implementation in Asia and the Pacific of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which had been adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held in New York in 2000. The Meeting also constituted the regional preparatory activity for the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, to be carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, to be held in New York in March 2005.
3. The Meeting was preceded by an expert group meeting held in March 2004, which set the framework of broad issues and concerns within which the 12 critical areas of concern and relevant emerging issues in the region would be evaluated.

B. Attendance

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Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; Netherlands; New Zealand; Pakistan;
Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka;
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America
5. Representatives of Canada
6. The following United Nations

Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

8. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations were present: Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, International Organization for Migration and Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

9. Observers were present from non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council as well as those accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

C. Opening of the Meeting

10. In his statement, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP noted that the High-level Meeting

13. The Asian and Pacific region had witnessed notable progress in many aspects of development in the past 10 years, including progress in gender relations. However, despite concerted efforts, women in general had continued to face formidable obstacles to improving their social and economic status. Much of the progress had been in the formal arena of women's human rights, for example laws, institutional mechanisms, policy frameworks and national strategies and plans of action. A number of obstacles still remained: legal and customary barriers, deep-rooted, discriminatory socio-cultural perception and practices, prevailing poverty and the challenges of globalization.

14. The Permanent Secretary reiterated the Executive Secretary's sentiment that the challenges demanded stronger and more effective partnerships and the application of strategic responses that were grounded in the relevant economic and social contexts, with the participation and ownership of both women and men. He hoped that the Meeting would be a useful forum to deliberate upon strategies and ways forward, share knowledge and experiences, resolve to make the best and widest possible use of the spirit of cooperation, experiences and innovation, and agree to accord women's empowerment and gender equality a prominent place on the Asian and Pacific national, subregional and regional agendas.

15. A statement was delivered by the Director, Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Officer in Charge, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. She placed the Meeting in the global context of a continuous cycle of research and analysis; goal-setting; reviewing progress to identify achievements as well as gaps, challenges and obstacles; and renewing and expanding commitments set by the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. She noted that there was increased commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and growing awareness of the synergies between the Platform for Action and the Convention. Future focus should be on ensuring full implementation of the Convention at the national level, including by highlighting the importance of the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

16. The Director noted that gender mainstreaming was an important global strategy and stressed that a major challenge was to ensure that gender analysis was the basis for policy development and decision-making in all areas, and that actors at all levels, women as well as men, had the awareness, commitment and capacity required to identify and address gender issues in their work. Strengthened accountability mechanisms, to ensure implementation of the many excellent policies and strategies already in place at the national level, were also required. In addition, national mechanisms for the advancement of women had important catalytic roles to play in advocating, supporting and monitoring the attention given to gender perspectives in the work of line ministries and other critical bodies at the national level. Increasing partnerships formed between Governments and civil society for the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality were creating new and important synergies and facilitating the active involvement of a broad range of stakeholders.

D. Election of officers

17. The Meeting elected Ms. Habiba Sarabi (Afghanistan), Chairperson and elected the following heads of delegation Vice-Chairpersons: Ms. Zahra Guileyava (Azerbaijan); Ms. Khurshid Zahan Haque (Bangladesh); Ms. Ing Kantha Phavi (Cambodia); Ms. Chen Xiurong (China); Ms. Adi Asenaca Caucau (Fiji); Ms. Kanti Singh (India); Ms. Nurlini Kasri (Indonesia); Mr. Aberoti Nikora (Kiribati); Ms. Beaulan Carl-Worswick (Federated States of Micronesia); Ms. Asta Laxmi Shakya (Nepal); Ms. Imelda M. Nicolas (Philippines); Ms. Eun-hee Chi (Republic of Korea); Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (Singapore); Mr. Nelson Kehe Kile (Solomon Islands); Mr. Sora-at Klinpratoom (Thailand); and Ms. Ha Thi Khiet (Viet Nam).

18. Ms. Yoriko Meguro, Representative of Japan to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and Ms. Luagalau Foisagaasina Eteuati Shon, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa, were elected joint Rapporteurs.

E. Adoption of the agenda

19. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional and global outcomes.
5. Implementation gaps and challenges ahead in the ESCAP region.
6. Approaches for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for gender equality.
7. Adoption of the report.

II. REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND ITS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OUTCOMES

20. In considering document E/ESCAP/BPA/1, "Review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional and global outcomes", the Meeting made the following observations.

21. All countries of the Asian and Pacific region reaffirmed the consensus of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000, many countries had made progress, including the formulation of national action plans to

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promote gender equality and empower women; the establishment of national machineries for the advancement of women; improvements in areas concerning women's health, including maternal and reproductive health and longer life expectancy; revision of domestic laws and regulations discriminating against women; affirmative measures to improve women's political participation; increased access of women to basic education and significant decrease in women's illiteracy rate; and women's economic empowerment through microcredit, microentrepreneurship development programme and income-generating activities.

A. Women and poverty

22. Almost all of the countries in the ESCAP region had introduced programmes for poverty reduction and alleviation. Income-generation schemes centring around microcredit, public works programmes (for example, food for work), technological upgrading, skills development programmes and the provision of some form of social safety nets featured not only in attempts to create income-earning opportunities for women and to broaden women's economic participation, but also in health and education. Microcredit should integrate gender empowerment, family planning, responsible parenthood and women's health into the programmes to deliver other support services, such as health facilities, education, skills training and technology upgrading, to women in poverty. Programmes included poverty mapping, nationwide village funds, farmers' temporary debt suspension schemes, a cyber women information database incorporating the 12 critical areas of concern and articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with which to benefit all sectors working on the emancipation of women. Additionally, there were programmes addressing food security, watershed development and social forestry.

23. Several developed countries of the region had adopted measures to assist low-income families, minority and indigenous groups in improving their livelihoods and realizing their right to development. Those measures had included provisions in their national budgets for childcare facilities, income supplements and skills development programmes. Additionally, development assistance from developed countries had helped the Governments of some developing countries to provide protection and assistance in addressing issues such as violence against women, including trafficking, HIV/AIDS and access to health care and education.

B. Education and training of women

24. A wide range of policy initiatives and strategies had been adopted in the region, resulting in significant progress in promoting women's education and training. Most of those initiatives were

and had established more flexible and diversified forms of education, such as half-day primary schools, part-time primary schools and girls' primary schools, in poverty-stricken areas.

25. As a consequence, gender gaps in education in several countries of the region had been reduced and very high rates of female adult literacy had been achieved in a number of countries. The Meeting was pleased to note that a number of countries were well on the way to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

26. In some countries, female enrolment rates were reportedly higher than male enrolment rates in some or all levels of education. Examples included countries where women were outperforming men in several areas of education, including having higher literacy rates, high-school completion rates and university entrance rates; the establishment of a centre for gender policy; and the development of diploma programmes in gender management and women's studies. Nevertheless, some countries in the region had a long way to go before parity between the genders was reached at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

27. Access to vocational training and opportunities to acquire know-how and skills, especially at the higher level, remained a precondition for women to acquire new skills and secure entry into higher levels of responsibility in business, academia, professional bodies and public offices. Several countries had introduced vocational training programmes to impart new and emerging skills to women and lifelong training for girls and women so that their skills and experiences remained relevant in a fast-changing environment. In addition, motivational and counselling programmes to encourage girls to choose careers in the fields of science and technology had been undertaken. Women, however, continued to face difficulties in gaining entry into those fields owing to a variety of factors, including gender stereotyping.

C. Women and health

28. In many countries, Governments had forged close partnerships with non-governmental organizations in delivering basic health-care services to women and children and had succeeded in developing broad-based health-care facilities, in both the rural and urban areas.

E. Women and armed conflict

34. Violence against women in situations of civil strife and war was a prevalent human rights violation in some countries. The need for effective institutional arrangements to guarantee protection of women from armed conflicts a

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

38. At the institutional level, all Governments had demonstrated their political will through

exploitation of children. Some countries had established legal and institutional mechanisms to safeguard children against all forms of violence. Yet, a number of Governments acknowledged that the rights of the girl child in their countries remained violated in several respects. They acknowledged the need for more comprehensive approaches to ensure the right to life, participation and development for girl children.

Human rights and women (E/1995/23/Rev.1, paras. 11.2-11.4)

D. Violence against women

55. Several countries reported that violence against women in all its forms, including violence during internal strife and armed conflict and domestic violence, trafficking in women and girls, spousal abuse, harmful practices and sexual abuse, was a grave social problem. Concern was expressed that such violence might irreparably damage the reproductive and sexual health of women and girls. The issues needed to be viewed as a human rights concern.

E. Women and armed conflict

56. The Meeting noted with concern the situations of conflict in some countries in the region and the serious impact on the rights and livelihoods of women and children in particular. Militarism, war and armed conflict were also referred to as having a negative effect on women's lives and the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

57. Years of armed conflict in Afghanistan had severely affected the situation of women in the country. The conflict had also damaged the country's statistical capacity. Thus, in statistical terms, very little was known about the status of women in Afghanistan. Additionally, figures for women's life expectancy, poverty, maternal mortality and morbidity were disturbing. Almost half the deaths among Afghan women in the reproductive age group were from pregnancy and childbirth complications. Poverty, lack of access to health facilities and emergency obstetric care, early marriage and childbearing, high fertility, lack of antenatal and post-natal care, and poor nutrition were among the health problems that continued to plague women in Afghanistan.

F. Women and the economy

58. It was a matter of deep concern that discriminatory practices, where those existed, continued in both the formal and informal sectors, created wage differentials, and hampered promotions, access to education and training opportunities and occupational mobility. Such discrimination went against the spirit and the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action. Moreover, women working in the informal sector seldom enjoyed any legal or social protection. Several best practices had been adopted in a number of countries to discourage and overcome discriminatory practices in the labour market, including measures to assist employers in issuing non-discriminatory job advertisements, prohibition of sexual harassment to protect female employees and revision of equal employment opportunity law to remove discrimination with regard to maternity leave, restrictions on overtime work, holiday work and night work by women.

59. Women's economic empowerment involved the provision of a reasonable degree of financial autonomy and independence, and participation in economic decision-making with regard to matters ranging from macropolicies and macroprogrammes to household-level disbursements or disposition of income and resources. It also rested on the recognition and valuation of women's unpaid work which maintained and supported the family and society. Women's economic empowerment also involved

security of employment, working environments that were safe from physical health hazards as well as sexual harassment, and work contracts that were drawn up in accordance with international labour standards. Additional fundamental elements of women's economic empowerment were freedom from fear of traffickers of women and punishment for those involved in trafficking in any capacity, legal rights as migrants, and child labour rights, particularly of girls.

60. The feminization of migration presented formidable challenges for countries of origin and destination. Women migrant workers were vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Those problems were compounded for women workers in irregular situations and those who were trafficked. The trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation was particularly serious in several subregions of the Asian and Pacific region. Greater official commitment and arrangements by sending countries were called for, including a clear policy for the safe and legal migration of women workers and enhanced cooperation between sending and receiving countries to promote the protection of such workers.

61. Additionally, access to and control over resources, including skills that would allow and enable women to engage in various economic enterprises, particularly in high-value, high-return activities, were vitally important.

62. Globalization and increased interdependence had begun to have a decisive impact on the economic and political relationships between countries of the region. Globalization had brought significant opportunities as well as difficult challenges. Access to external resources, trade opportunities and new forms of technology had contributed significantly to the economic growth in the region, bringing expanded opportunities for women's economic and social advancement. Globalization had also made the countries of the region more vulnerable to external shocks. Disadvantaged groups such as women faced greater insecurity in urban and rural employment markets and marginalization in the agricultural sector. Reference had been made to the need to develop innovative concepts and a global, fair and just environment sufficiently capable of responding to the new dynamics as well as the negative effects resulting from globalization. It was also important to integrate gender analysis into macroeconomic development processes. That would require emphasis on fiscal and trade processes. In trade, it was important not only to understand the gender implications of trade issues, but also to emphasize increased participation of women in trade negotiations.

G. Women in power and decision-making

63. The impact of the Fourth World Conference on Women had spread through national political thinking, as shown in the progress achieved in areas such as (a) the increase in the number of women running as candidates and winning elections, (b) quotas or reservation systems established by Governments and political parties, (c) training in self-confidence and political skills provided by non-governmental organizations, (d) cooperation among Governments, non-governmental organizations

and other sectors working for women's issues and (e) mainstreaming of gender issues in national development plans, including measures to foster women's political development. Despite the progress made, the target of achieving 30 per cent representation of women in decision-making positions by 2005, as stipulated by the United Nations, appeared to be beyond the reach of many countries in the region. The obstacles to achieving that goal included the pervasive influence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes that restricted women's political participation and the persisting institutional barriers that existed across various socio-political institutions, such as lack of a critical mass of women in politics. The stereotypical and traditional expectations of women in society and lack of training and mentoring often made women doubt their suitability for high-level positions.

64. Institutional changes were also necessary to facilitate an increase in women's representation and decision-making in all areas of the mainstream development agenda. Institutionalization of gender analysis, gender statistics and other techniques of gender mainstreaming required increased attention.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

65. Some national machineries in several developing countries appeared to be marginalized in the national planning and policy-making process and were often under-resourced. The limitation of financial and human resources for promoting gender equality was an issue for developed countries as well. Mainstreaming as a systematic approach to ensure gender-responsive implementation of policies and plans had not yet been institutionalized in most countries. A number of women's machineries had yet to be enabled to play a catalytic and lead role in mainstreaming gender into sector policies and programmes.

I. Women and the media

66. Despite the repeated emphases on the necessity for a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, images of women as inferior beings or, worse, as sexual objects and commodities, were still prevalent. Such portrayals caused continuous reinforcement of the stereotypical and traditional roles of women.

J. The girl child

67. In many countries, the girl child suffered from the combined effects of poverty, resulting in malnutrition, a lack of education and low self-esteem, thereby limiting the potential of girls. In that context, the girl child was vulnerable to various forms of abuse in the family and in the streets, including hazardous child labour, juvenile prostitution and pornography. In situations of conflict, her vulnerability was acute.

K. Human rights and women

68.

reporting structures and identify their problems, including reporting overload along with the need for

indicators and forging closer cooperation and partnerships with stakeholders. Some pertinent issues identified in the context of remaining challenges included gender and HIV/AIDS, the impacts of globalization and trade liberalization, women migrant workers and armed conflict.

- Strengthening of women's national machineries and institutional mechanisms.
- Improving allocation of financial and human resources and increasing allocation of financial resources.
- Developing gender-sensitive indicators and sex disaggregated statistics for measuring progress.
- Forging close cooperation and partnership with stakeholders.
- Creating an enabling environment to support policies and affirmative action programmes to ensure women's access to economic resources and opportunities, education and health, and including reproductive health.
- Increasing the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of reproductive health services, especially for poor, young and marginalized women.
- Reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS.
- Promoting gender mainstreaming as a systematic approach to ensure gender-responsive implementation of policies and plans to be institutionalized.
- Addressing the negative impacts of globali

WE ENCOURAGE the strengthening of cooperation and partnerships, and the commitment to allocating increased resources by governments, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and regional, international and intergovernmental agencies.

WE THEREFORE RENEW OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FULL AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION.

WE OFFER THIS COMMUNIQUÉ AS THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE MEETING ON THE GLOBAL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AT ITS FORTY-NINTH SESSION TO BE HELD IN NEW YORK IN MARCH 2005.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

83. The Meeting adopted the report containing the Bangkok Communiqué on 10 September 2004 and requested the secretariat to transmit the report to the Commission on the Status of Women. The report constituted the input of the Asian and Pacific region to the forthcoming forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in New York in March 2005, at which the

Annex I

recommended in all declarations and conventions addressing violence against women. Increased attention must be paid to monitoring trends and situations of violence against women. A second challenge was the issue of cultural relativism and cultural rights in relationship to women's rights. Asian values were not more tolerant of violence against women than Western liberal values, yet there were still very harmful cultural practices that violated women's human rights in some countries in the region. Countries must also work towards women's economic empowerment as well as women's sexual autonomy to combat violence against women in the region. Trafficking must be seen as an aspect of migration. Strong laws and policies were needed to combat trafficking, yet that should not hinder regular economic migration or women's rights to cross borders in search of economic opportunities or to escape negative conditions in their own communities.

Ms. Nancy Hafkin noted that gender differences continued to be largely ignored in information and communication technology (ICT) advances, although the five-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had recommended actions to be taken to develop initiatives to give women greater access to ICTs and give them access to the gains offered by ICT. The growth of ICT had been uneven in other ways. It had been concentrated in urban areas and wealthier countries. There was a need to ensure that new technologies promoted gender equality and did not perpetuate or create additional gender disadvantages. Specific attention must be paid to gender issues to ensure that the effective use of ICT improved the lives and livelihoods of all citizens and alleviated poverty. Countries must encourage more women to participate in ICT decision-making, promote women's increased access to technological training and capacity-building, increase the collection of gender disaggregated indicators and targets, as well as focus on combating sexual exploitation over the Internet. Women's e-commerce opportunities must be increased, and policy makers as well as gender advocates must become more aware of ICT issues.

Ms. Socorro Reyes discussed the need for greater efforts to fulfil previous commitments made by Governments outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and during the five-year review and appraisal. Political participation was a human right and as such Governments were duly bound to build an environment to ensure that women's political participation was effective and sustainable. Governments had made significant commitments to increase women's political participation in all areas of governance and particularly in decision-making. However, given the current rate of women's representation between 1995 and 2004, it would take approximately 58 years to achieve gender balance in women's parliamentary participation. Additionally, using the players-process-product framework it was stressed that, while increased numbers of women in local and national governing

effectiveness of women politicians to address gender in development obj

Ms. Savitri Goonesekere underscored the indivisibility and interdependence of civil and political

the Beijing Platform for Action. Special focus was given to partnerships in the Beijing process from the preparations at the country, regional and global levels, at the Conference itself and in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Some problems of partnership were discussed, such as unequal partnerships, ideological clashes, style conflicts, leadership issues and sustainability. Also discussed were the challenges that partnerships faced: to confront gaps and emerging issues, to re-invent governmental organization and non-governmental organization partnerships and to revitalize the women's movement through more creative partnerships with other social movements and with the younger generation.

Mr. Michael Flood explained how men had an important role to play in promoting gender equality because they were at once part of the problem and part of the solution, and were shaped by gender stereotypes and gender relations in the same way that women were. It was crucial that engaging men in initiatives to promote gender equality should not take place at the expense of gender equality work with women and girls and did not take away resources from programmes aimed at improving the lives of women and girls. The reconstruction of gender relations and achieving gender equality would involve a very strong partnership between women and men, because gender relations had impacts on the lives of women and men.

Annex II

Explanation of position by the United States of America

- The United States is pleased that ESCAP member States were able to work together to prepare this Meeting's outcome document and Bangkok Communiqué. We are joining consensus on the documents, and wish to give our explanation of position.
- The United States is firmly committed to the empowerment of women and the need to promote women's fullest enjoyment of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. We would like to emphasize the essential need to ensure that all women, as well as men, are provided with the education necessary to realize their full potential.
- The United States wishes to note in joining consensus that it is essential to recognize the rights,

- The United States does not support quotas. The position of the United States is that the best way to guarantee women's involvement in the political process is through legal and policy reforms that end discrimination against women and promote equality of opportunity. A disadvantage of quotas is that among some they promote a perception that a woman gained a decision-making position solely because of gender and regardless of merit.

Annex III

Explanation of position by France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and New Zealand, and Observer States Canada and Sweden

I take the floor on behalf of France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and New Zealand.

Almost 10 years ago, countries around the world, including all countries in the ESCAP region, negotiated and signed the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. We appreciate that, at this week's ESCAP High-level Meeting, countries took the opportunity to reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action and showed strong support for other global commitments, particularly the Millennium Declaration, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The review in New York next year can take from this Meeting the following:

- An absolute reaffirmation of Beijing;
- A commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action;
- A renewed resolve to achieve gender equality and the human rights of women.

We were pleased to observe a general consensus that the time had come to transfer words into actions.

We recognize the rights of any person, woman or man, to have control over her or his own life, body and sexuality.

More substantial progress is needed in the following areas:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights, including information for youth and adolescents;
- The negative impact of HIV and AIDS on women, especially poor and marginalized groups;
- Recognition of women's role in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building.

We look forward to further concrete progress in New York next year.