Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, China 4-15 September 1995

Platform for Action

and the Beijing Declaration



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The Beijing Declaration and The Platform for Action

Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, China 4-15 September 1995



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Translating the momentum of Beijing into action

By Boutros Boutros-Ghali

United Nations Secretary-General

All of us owe a debt of gratitude to the People's Republic of China, which has hosted one of the largest global conferences ever held, with some 17,000 participants, including 6,000 delegates from 189 countries, over 4,000 representatives of accredited non-governmental organizations, a host of international civil servants and about 4,000 media representatives. More than 30,000 people also participated in the NGO Forum.

My special thanks also go to the President of the Conference, Madame Chen Muhua, and to the Secretary-General of the Fourth World

Conference on Women, Mrs. Gertrude Mongella.

Now the momentum of Beijing must be translated into concrete action. We must all ensure that the decisions reached in Beijing will change the world.

The commitments made in Beijing are not only the result of diplomatic negotiation. Behind them lies the strong and organized power of the women's movement. The entire continuum of global conferences and summits has been shaped by the growing influence, passion and intellectual conviction of the women's movement.

At Rio, Vienna, Cairo and Copenhagen the importance of issues related to the improvement of the status of women was stressed. From each of these global conferences emerged a more powerful recognition of the crucial role of women in sustainable development and protecting the environment; of the human rights of women as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights; of violence against women as an intolerable violation of these rights; of health, maternal care and family planning facilities, and of access to education and information, as essential to the exercise by women of their fundamental rights.

In the United Nations, the women's movement has a staunch ally. Starting from the assertion in the Charter, calling for full equality of men

From the statement of the Secretary-General read on the concluding day of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 15 September 1995.

and women, the United Nations has worked with the women's movement to realize this goal of our founders. The Commission on the Status of Women was one of the first bodies established by the United Nations after its foundation. Over the past 20 years, World Conferences on Women, held in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi, have contributed to the progressive strengthening of the legal, economic, social and political dimensions of the role of women. In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the landmark Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The movement for gender equality the world over has been one of the defining developments of our time. I am proud and honoured that the United Nations has been part of this movement.

Despite the progress made, much, much more remains to be done. While women have made significant advances in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. Women face discrimination and marginalization in subtle as well as in flagrant ways. Women do not share equally in the fruits of production. Women constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor.

The sign at the entrance to the NGO Forum at Huairou calls on us to "Look at the world through women's eyes". For the past two weeks, the world has done just that. We have seen that, despite the progress made since the First World Conference on Women, 20 years ago, women and men still live in an unequal world. Gender disparities and unacceptable inequalities persist in all countries. In 1995 there is no country in the world where men and women enjoy complete equality.

The message of this Conference is that women's issues are global and universal. Deeply entrenched attitudes and practices perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women, in public and private life, on a daily basis, in all parts of the world. At the same time, there has emerged a consensus that equality of opportunity for all people is essential to the construction of just and democratic societies for the twenty-first century. The fundamental linkages between the three objectives of the Conference — equality, development and peace — are now recognized by all.

The Platform for Action has emerged from a preparatory process more participatory and inclusive than any in history. Never before have so many women, representing both Governments and non-governmental organizations, gathered to share experiences and chart the way ahead. The United Nations has provided the venue and the framework to move issues of gender equality to the top of the global agenda. The women of the world have been the driving force to shape this agenda and move it forward.

The Platform for Action is a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women. It calls for the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and programmes. It focuses on concrete measures to address the critical areas of concern worldwide. The Platform for Action must be our guide and con-

stant point of reference. I ask that it receive wide dissemination globally, regionally and locally. The implementation of its goals, objectives and measures must be actively monitored. And it must be further strengthened, as needed, to take account of new developments as they emerge.

As we set out on the road from Beijing, the Platform is a call for con-

crete action to make a difference:

◆ Action to protect and promote the human rights of women and the girl child as an integral part of universal human rights;

◆ Action to eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on

women;

 Action to remove the obstacles to women's full participation in public life and decision-making, at all levels — including the family;

Action to eliminate all forms of violence against women;

- Action to ensure equal access for girl children and women to education and health services;
- Action to promote economic autonomy for women, and ensure their access to productive resources; and

Action to encourage an equitable sharing of family responsibilities.

The Platform for Action places heavy responsibilities on the United Nations system. It calls upon United Nations organizations to play a key role in follow-up, implementation and monitoring. It poses a challenge to the capacity and commitment of the United Nations. As Secretary-General, I accept that challenge. I will ensure that the recommendations addressed to me are implemented swiftly and effectively. I am committed to placing the gender perspective into the mainstream of all aspects of the work of the Organization. I will work with my colleagues, the Executive Heads of the United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations Programmes and Funds, to ensure a coordinated system-wide response, integrating the follow-up of this Conference with that of other global conferences. And I will keep Member States regularly informed of the progress that is made.

Executive Heads of the organizations of the United Nations system have expressed their commitment to the advancement of women in the secretariats of the system as a policy priority. They have all committed themselves to developing specific policies and monitoring mechanisms to improve the status of women and, in particular, to increase the number of women in senior and policy-making positions.

The United Nations system is already active on a number of fronts which will prove critical to the implementation of the Platform. Reversing the trend towards the feminization of poverty. Raising the educational levels and health standards of women and girls. Expanding legal protection for women in the home. Establishing stronger protection for women in times of war. All these must be given priority.

I call on all Governments that have not yet done so to accede to and ratify United Nations human rights instruments and labour conventions —

in particular the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conclusion, let me emphasize the institutions of civil society which have played such an important role in preparing for this Conference. Since I assumed the office of Secretary-General, I have spoken often of the evolution of civil society and its importance for economic, cultural and democratic advancement. More effective mechanisms to ensure partnership between Governments and civil society will contribute significantly to the implementation of the policies and measures that are called for in the Platform. The United Nations will intensify the close ties and working relationships that already exist with the NGO community at the global and national levels. The United Nations will be prepared to support Governments in their endeavours to foster and strengthen the institutions of civil society.

In a few weeks, the leaders of the world will meet at United Nations Headquarters in a Summit of Heads of State and Government. There they will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

As the world celebrates this anniversary, let us work together to ensure that the equal rights of men and women, enshrined in the Charter, become a reality.

Let us work together to implement the Platform for Action adopted here at Beijing. Let us tell the world — and let us tell it with pride: the empowerment of women is the empowerment of all humanity!

Beijing Declaration

Adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995

Photo: UN/John Isaac



Beijing Declaration

- We, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women,
- Gathered here in Beijing in September 1995, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations,
- Determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity,
- Acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere and taking note of the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances, honouring the women who paved the way and inspired by the hope present in the world's youth,
- Recognize that the status of women has advanced in some important respects in the past decade but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people,
- Also recognize that this situation is exacerbated by the increasing poverty that is affecting the lives of the majority of the world's people, in particular women and children, with origins in both the national and international domains,
- 7. Dedicate ourselves unreservedly to addressing these constraints and obstacles and thus enhancing further the advancement and empowerment of women all over the world, and agree that this requires urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity, now and to carry us forward into the next century.

We reaffirm our commitment to:

- 8. The equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men and other purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development;
- Ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

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10. Build on consensus and progress made at previous United Nations conferences and summits — on women in Nairobi in 1985, on children in New York in 1990, on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, on human rights in Vienna in 1993, on population and development in Cairo in 1994 and on social development in Copenhagen in 1995 with the objective of achieving equality, development and peace;

11. Achieve the full and effective implementation of the Nairobi Forward-

looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women;

12. The empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations.

We are convinced that:

13. Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace;

14. Women's rights are human rights;

15. Equal rights, opportunities and access to resources, equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy:

16. Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centred sustainable development;

17. The explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is

basic to their empowerment:

18. Local, national, regional and global peace is attainable and is inextricably linked with the advancement of women, who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels;

19. It is essential to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gendersensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women;

20. The participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particu-

larly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action;

21. The implementation of the Platform for Action requires commitment from Governments and the international community. By making national and international commitments for action, including those made at the Conference, Governments and the international community recognize the need to take priority action for the empowerment and advancement of women.

We are determined to:

22. Intensify efforts and actions to achieve the goals of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women by the end of this century;

 Ensure the full enjoyment by women and the girl child of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and take effective action against vio-

lations of these rights and freedoms;

24. Take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and remove all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women;

25. Encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality;

26. Promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services;

27. Promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through the provision of basic education, lifelong education, literacy and training, and primary health care for girls and

women;

- 28. Take positive steps to ensure peace for the advancement of women and, recognizing the leading role that women have played in the peace movement, work actively towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, and support negotiations on the conclusion, without delay, of a universal and multilaterally and effectively verifiable comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty which contributes to nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects;
- 29. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls;
- Ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education;

31. Promote and protect all human rights of women and girls;

32. Intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or disability, or because they are indigenous people;

33. Ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, in

order to protect women and girls in particular;

34. Develop the fullest potential of girls and women of all ages, ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all and enhance their role in the development process.

We are determined to:

35. Ensure women's equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including through the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources, *inter alia*, by means of international cooperation;

36. Ensure the success of the Platform for Action, which will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels. We are deeply convinced that economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development, which is the framework for our efforts to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Equitable social development that recognizes empowering the poor, particularly women living in poverty, to utilize environmental resources sustainably is a necessary foundation for sustainable development. We also recognize that broad-based and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development is necessary to sustain social development and social justice. The success of the Platform for Action will also require adequate mobilization of resources at the national and international levels as well as new and additional resources to the developing countries from all available funding mechanisms, including multilateral, bilateral and private sources for the advancement of women; financial resources to strengthen the capacity of national, subregional, regional and international institutions; a commitment to equal rights, equal responsibilities and equal opportunities and to the equal participation of women and men in all national, regional and international bodies and policymaking processes; and the establishment or strengthening of mechanisms at all levels for accountability to the world's women;

- 37. Ensure also the success of the Platform for Action in countries with economies in transition, which will require continued international cooperation and assistance;
- 38. We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to implement the following Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes. We urge the United Nations system, regional and international financial institutions, other relevant regional and international institutions and all women and men, as well as non-governmental organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, and all sectors of civil society, in cooperation with Governments, to fully commit themselves and contribute to the implementation of this Platform for Action.



Adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995

Photo: UN Photo

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