

Beijing at ten

achieving gender equality, development and peace

PRESS RELEASE

Governments pledge to accelerate efforts to achieve equality for women and fulfil Beijing commitments, as UN Commission concludes

(New York, 11 March 2004) – A two-week meeting to review progress made since a major women’s conference in Beijing ten years ago concluded today by underscoring the need for governments to do more to achieve gender equality and facilitate the advancement of women.

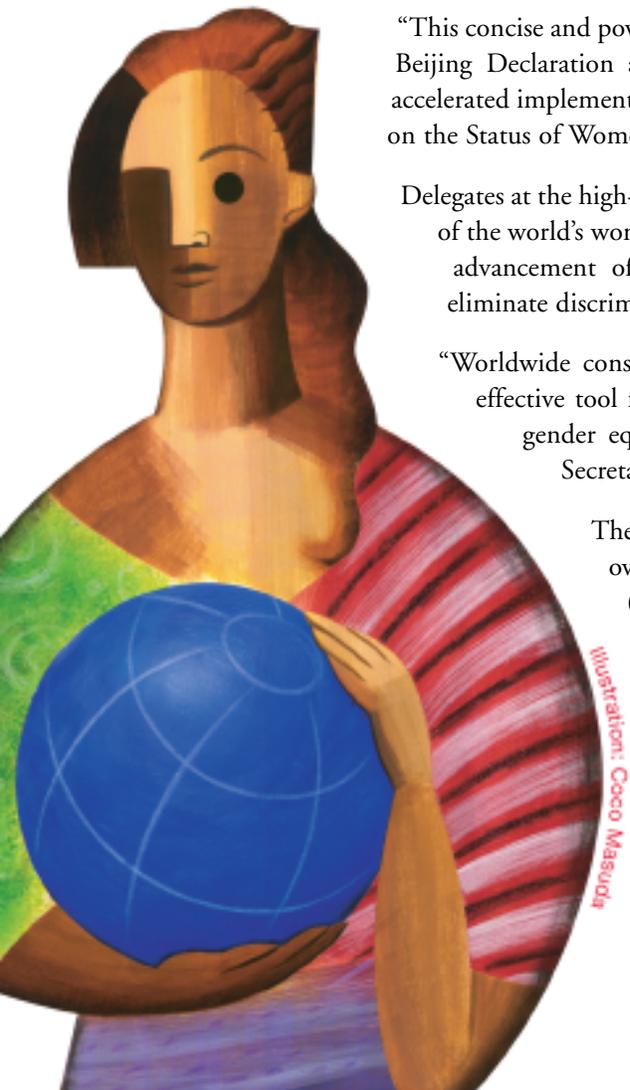
A Declaration reaffirming the commitments made ten years ago in Beijing and calling for further action from governments was adopted at the end of the first week. This was the most significant outcome of the meeting, which was held as part of the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women from 28 February to 11 March at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

“This concise and powerful declaration is an unqualified and unconditional reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and a pledge of further action for full and accelerated implementation of Beijing,” said Kyung-wha Kang, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Delegates at the high-level plenary session detailed the progress that has been made in the status of the world’s women over the last decade – improvements in girls’ education, the economic advancement of women and increased political participation, as well as reforms to eliminate discriminatory laws.

“Worldwide consensus has built around the idea that empowering women is the most effective tool for development and poverty reduction, and that remaining obstacles to gender equality can be overcome,” said Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

The extraordinary level of participation included approximately 80 Ministers, over 1800 government delegates from 165 Member States, seven First Ladies (from Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, Mali, Mexico, Panama, South Africa and Suriname), and more than 2600 non-governmental representatives from all regions of the world. This level of attendance clearly signaled the large amount of interest and high expectations related to the ten-year review.



Delegates discussed best practices and shared experiences and recommended innovative ways of promoting gender equality that ranged from appointing high-level commissioners on gender issues and establishing inter-departmental taskforces, to organizing women's caucuses and campaigns to encourage greater participation in decision-making. A series of roundtables focused on such areas as the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Other topics covered included upgrading data collection and analysis and recognizing the impact of economic policies on women.

“Ten years after Beijing, this review called attention to the many areas where women's equality is still not a reality – continuing high rates of violence against women in all parts of the world including in armed conflict, increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS among women, gender inequality in employment, lack of sexual and reproductive health rights and a lack of equal access under the law to land and property, to name a few,” said Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women.

A highlight of the meeting was an observance on 4 March to celebrate 30 years since the first world conference on women was held in Mexico City. The tribute brought participants to their feet as they applauded distinguished speakers including Nobel laureates Rigoberta Menchú and Wangari Maathai and speeches presented by former Secretaries-General of the four World Conferences on Women: Helvi Sipilä, Finland, by video (World Conference in Mexico City, 1975); extracts of speech read on behalf of Lucille Mair, Jamaica (World Conference in Copenhagen, 1980); Leticia Shahani, the Philippines (World Conference in Nairobi, 1985) and Gertrude Mongella, Tanzania (World Conference in Beijing, 1995).

Another key aspect of the meeting was the quantity and diversity of parallel events organized mainly by the non-governmental community, as well as by Member States and UN agencies. On topics ranging from the plight of women in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sudan and other conflict zones to women in post-tsunami reconstruction efforts, youth and perceptions of gender roles, inheritance rights, trafficking, and women's health issues, including HIV/AIDS, the events underlined the critical role of civil society in efforts to bring about gender equality.

For further information on the Ten-Year Review and Appraisal, please visit: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review

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