

**Statement by
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**UN-ESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional
Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and its Regional and Global Outcomes
7-10 September 2004**

Mr. Wanlop Phlop Phloytabtim, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development
and Human Security, Royal Thai Government
Honourable Ministers
Executive Secretary, Mr. Kim Hak-Su
Distinguished Delegates and Participants

I am greatly honoured to address this United Nations-ESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes. I would like to congratulate the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), particularly Ms. Thelma Kay, Chief of the Emerging Social Issues Division and her team in the Gender and Development Section, for the excellent organization of this important meeting.

In 2005 we will commemorate the ten year anniversary of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995 and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is also the thirtieth anniversary of the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. The First World Conference set the stage for a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women by establishing concrete global commitments on the empowerment of women and gender equality. The overall vision established at the First World Conference on Women: Gender Equality – Development – Peace, continues to guide us today and the importance of the integral links between equality, development and peace is increasingly highlighted. A critical process was set in motion – involving 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. This regional meeting is an important part of that process.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, called for at the First World Conference on Women, was adopted in 1979 and entered into force two years later in 1981. Its full implementation was called for in the Platform for Action in 1995 and in the review of its implementation in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000. Today, the Convention has been signed

by 178 Member States and its Optional Protocol has been adopted by 64 States parties. The 25th anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979 will be celebrated this year. There is increased commitment to implementation of CEDAW, and growing awareness of the synergies between the implementation of the Platform for Action and of CEDAW.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants

Twenty years after Mexico – building on the achievements of the Second and Third World Conferences on Women in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) as well as the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) – the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and the outcome of its review in the General Assembly in New York in 2000, moved the global agenda for the advancement of women forward significantly. 189 countries unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which identified 12 critical areas for action. Designed as an agenda for women's empowerment, the emphasis of the Platform for Action is on the integration of women as full and equal partners in decision-making processes, and increased attention to their concerns and priorities in all areas of development. The responsibilities of Governments and all other actors and stakeholders were clearly outlined.

With the adoption of the Platform for Action, Governments committed themselves to the effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives throughout all policy development and planning processes. They undertook to consider development issues from both women's and men's perspectives, before decisions were made and resources allocated. Gender mainstreaming remains an important global strategy for women's empowerment and gender equality, alongside activities targeted to address specific gaps and inequalities. While many achievements have been made on gender mainstreaming, both by Member States and by the United Nations system, serious gaps and challenges remain which need to be explicitly identified and addressed. A major challenge is to ensure that gender analysis is the basis for policy development and decision-making in all areas, and that actors at all levels, women as well as men, have 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 national level, are also required. National mechanisms for the advancement of women have important catalytic roles to play, advocating, supporting and monitoring the attention to gender perspectives in the work of line ministries and other critical bodies at national level.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants,

In 2000, Member States of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration to galvanize global support for the full implementation of the development agenda established in the global conferences and summits of the 1990s. The Millennium Declaration explicitly outlined that gender equality and the empowerment of women is an essential precondition for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the achievement of

sustainable development. One Millennium Development Goal is specifically focused on gender equality and women's empowerment, but gender perspectives must be explicitly identified and addressed in relation to all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Efforts are underway to expand the targets and indicators to more adequately reflect the broad range of gaps and challenges facing the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women today.

The overall global framework for gender equality and empowerment of women remains the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from 1995 and the emerging issues identified in the review and appraisal in 2000. The framework of the Millennium Development Goals does not replace this global framework but should be seen as an instrument to support its full implementation. It needs to be kept in mind that, despite significant efforts, few measurable targets were established in the Platform for Action and the outcome of the review and appraisal. Working in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, with globally endorsed targets and indicators, does, therefore, represent an important opportunity for increasing the focus on national level implementation and measuring progress and outcomes.

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Many achievements have been made in relation to women's empowerment and gender equality over the past decades. There have, for example, been significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. However, the fact that, 30 years after the First World Conference on Women, and ten years after the Beijing Conference, many of the goals set have not yet been achieved is to be lamented. The persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women, the under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels, the lack of access of many women to basic reproductive health services, and the fact that women are disproportionately affected by poverty, is unacceptable. In addition, over the past decades, new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality have emerged which need to be addressed, for example in relation to HIV/AIDS, globalization, trafficking and ICT.

The understanding of the structural causes for the persistence of the discrimination that women and girls face has increased greatly. New approaches are, however, needed to directly address these causes, rather than focus solely on the symptoms and consequences of inequalities as they are reflected in the lives of women and girls. In this new millennium a key focus should also be the strengths and contributions of women. While in no way downplaying the real risks and vulnerabilities that women and girls face in many contexts – for example in conflict and post-conflict situations - the enormous potential of women and girls, and the development costs of continued discrimination and neglect of their human rights, should be further highlighted. The fact that there can be no real development without the full participation and contribution of women as well as men should be a driving force in future efforts.

A further important challenge is to promote increased engagement and active involvement of men and boys, in partnership with women and girls. Women's empowerment and gender equality should be addressed as a critical societal issue of concern to both women and men. Over the past decade, steps have been taken in this direction, as evidenced most recently with the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women at its 48th session in March 2004, of agreed conclusion on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.

Perhaps one of the most significant processes that evolved over the past decades has been the development of strong and vibrant networks of civil society groups, at national, regional and global levels. Women's groups and networks, have increased in strength and effectiveness and have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility and recognition of the importance of gender equality for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation of the commitment made by Governments has been particularly significant. The increasing partnerships between Governments and civil society on the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality is an extremely positive development, which is creating new and important synergies.

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In the political Declaration adopted in 2000 during the five year review and appraisal of implementation of the Platform for Action, Member States agreed to "assess regularly further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, ten years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action".

The ten-year review and appraisal will be undertaken in the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session in 2005. A questionnaire to Member States on implementation at national level, provides an important basis for the Secretary-General's report to be presented to the Commission. The questionnaire is focused on a review of major achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as priority areas for further action to ensure full implementation. The deadline for responses to the questionnaire was 30 April 2004. To date the secretariat has received 105 responses from governments.

At its 48th session in March 2004, the Commission decided that the review and appraisal would focus on implementation at the national level, through the expanded use of interactive dialogue, and with broad-based participation of governmental delegations at the highest level of responsibility and expertise, and of civil society and organizations within the United Nations system. There will be emphasis on the sharing of experiences and good practices in overcoming remaining challenges to implementation. The challenge in the review and appraisal will be to facilitate the development of more

effective ways of translating the commitments made by Governments, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, and civil society, into effective action programmes to ensure full implementation at national level.

ECOSOC also adopted a decision during its substantive session in July 2004 on “Preparations for the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women” which calls for a high-level plenary meeting, open to the participation of all United Nations Member States and Observers, on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The Chairperson of the 49th Session of the Commission was requested to transmit the outcome of the Commission, through ECOSOC, to the sixtieth session of the general Assembly, including to the high-level event on the review of the Millennium Declaration.

The Bureau has submitted a proposed programme of work for the Commission in 2005 for the approval of Members of the Commission. This includes a number of interactive events, including high-level panels and roundtables, on issues such as the review and appraisal processes at regional level; innovations in national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality; the linkages between the Platform for Action and the Monterrey Consensus; the role of regional intergovernmental bodies in promoting gender equality; synergies between national level implementation of the Platform for Action and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; challenges in linking implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the Platform for Action; and the perspectives of young women and men for gender equality in the future.

It is expected that there will be high-level participation during the review and appraisal to bring a strong message of renewed and enhanced commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The activities proposed by the Bureau in the first week of the Commission offer interesting opportunities for high-level participation – at the high-level opening; the High-level Plenary where Member States will make national statements on achievements, gaps and challenges and renewed commitments; the interactive events mentioned earlier; and in the celebration of International Women’s Day with a commemoration of 30 years of United Nations efforts for gender equality. There will also be many side-events, organized by Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations.

Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups and networks have made major contributions to reviews of progress in women’s empowerment and gender equality over the past 30 years, and continue to do so today, as evidenced by the NGO meeting held in June this year. Significant participation and contributions from women’s groups and networks is also anticipated in the forthcoming global review and appraisal in 2005 in New York.

The Division for the Advancement of Women has set up webpage (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/index.htm>) which will provide updated information on the review and appraisal process.

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This regional meeting provides an important opportunity to reflect on the potentials and challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action at national and regional level, that need to be addressed in the global review and appraisal next year. It is heartening that so many representatives of Governments, United Nations entities and civil society organizations in the region have gathered here to share experiences on achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as further actions required to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national and regional levels.

The whole United Nations stands ready to support Governments, civil society and other stakeholders in this region in their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at national level. In this context, I am happy to inform you that on 12 August the Secretary-General appointed Ms Rachel Mayanja, the Director of the Human Resources Management Division in FAO, as the new Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

I wish you every success in your discussions and I am confident that this meeting will contribute towards our common goal – the realization of the empowerment of women and equality between women and men.

Thank you.