

Assessing progress 20 years after Beijing

His Excellency Ambassador Antonio de Aguiar Patriota
Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations
Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women

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Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address this year's integration segment of the Economic and Social Council, after having just been elected as Chair of the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Commission on the Status of Women marked the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women with a comprehensive review and appraisal of the status of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The session was the culmination of a two-year process that included extensive national level reviews. An unprecedented 167 States conducted such reviews, a confirmation of the importance that governments attribute to the realization of gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls. All five regional commissions of the United Nations conducted regional intergovernmental meetings, which resulted in concrete commitments for further action. Many other review activities were also convened by civil society and the UN system.

The Political Declaration, adopted by consensus, sent a strong and clear signal of where we stand, and what is expected moving forward. The Commission reaffirmed the Platform for Action and welcomed progress made. But the Commission also made it clear that, 20 years after Beijing, no country has achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women, and recognized that many women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization throughout their life cycle. We cannot afford to leave half of humankind behind. Therefore, special consideration should be given to improving the lives of those who are most deprived, including women of African descent, women with disabilities, old women, indigenous women, among others.

Crucially, Ministers and Government officials pledged to take further concrete actions to ensure the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, through six strategies. They are:

- strengthened implementation of laws, policies and strategies
- strengthened and increased support for institutional mechanisms for gender equality
- transformation of discriminatory norms and gender stereotypes
- significantly increased investment for gender equality to close resource gaps through both, domestic resource mobilization and development cooperation
- strengthened accountability for the implementation of existing commitments; and
- enhanced capacity building, data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

The Commission welcomed the contribution of civil society and pledged to continue to support them including by promoting a safe and enabling environment for them. And, Ministers committed to use all opportunities and processes in 2015 and beyond to accelerate and achieve the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and strive for the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women by 2030.

These are clear commitments.

And these commitments are essential because progress has been unacceptably slow. Gender inequality remains deeply entrenched with stark gaps in achievement across all 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action.

This is also the case in regard to employment and decent work, although already 20 years ago, the Platform for Action gave significant attention to women and the economy, women and poverty and education and training for women – all areas that are pivotal to this year’s integration segment. Let me illustrate these gaps with some facts that were presented to the Commission by the Secretary-General:

- Gender gaps in labour force participation rates remain substantial and have only marginally declined over the last 20 years. While more women are now in the labour force, they continue to be clustered in vulnerable and informal types of work.
- Gender-based occupational segregation is a key factor contributing to women’s labour market disadvantages, and such segregation is also influenced by social norms and gender stereotypes about what is considered appropriate work for women and men.
- The gender pay gap is a universal phenomenon. At the current pace of progress it would take more than 75 years to reach equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- Women also continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work which limits their economic and political participation. In general, where women have increased their labour force participation rates, this has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in men’s participation in unpaid domestic and care work.
- Advances in women’s and girls’ educational attainment have not been matched with corresponding improvements in their employment outcomes.

A key finding of the 20-year review is that the global economic landscape has not been enabling for the implementation of all areas of the Platform for Action. The global financial and economic crises and volatile food and energy prices have intensified inequalities and vulnerability, with specific impacts on women and girls. Austerity measures that have been adopted in many countries since 2010 have put the gains towards gender equality in further jeopardy through cutbacks in public services and social protection. In general, macroeconomic policies have not been enabling of decent work for women or public investments in areas needed to achieve gender equality.

The Commission on the Status of Women as the principal policymaking body of the United Nations in the field of gender equality and the empowerment of women has been instrumental in raising visibility and in recommending policies, programmes and other measures to accelerate employment creation and decent work for women. These recommendations should be an integral part of the Council's considerations.

In 2014, for example, the Commission assessed progress in the MDGs for women and girls. It detailed steps to be taken in this regard, including promotion of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, addressing the gendered division of labour, prohibition and redress of sexual harassment, prevention of discrimination against women in the workplace, reconciliation of paid work with family/care responsibilities for both women and men, and promotion of women's full and equal participation in the formal economy and empowerment of women in the informal economy, with particular attention to women domestic workers. The Commission also called for implementation of macroeconomic policies that, together with labour and social policies, promote full and productive employment and decent work for all and gender equality and the empowerment of women, and for universal social protection across the life cycle.

These findings and recommendations should inspire this Integration segment. Some of them are also reflected in the report of the Open Working Group and also provide important lessons for the post-2015 development agenda.

As the Economic and Social Council considers as its main annual theme the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls must be a central priority in the Council's work. The Commission on the Status of Women stands ready to contribute to the follow-up to the post-2015 development agenda, to be adopted at the United Nations Summit in September 2015.

I thank you for your attention.