



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

19 November 2020

Excellency,

Further to the successful conclusion of the high-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held at the level of Heads of State and Government on 1 October 2020, I have the pleasure to circulate herewith the summary of the meeting, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/340.

While significant progress has been made since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, no country has achieved gender equality. As we embark on the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, I call on all Member States and stakeholders to commit to accelerating the realization of gender equality.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Volkan Bozkir'.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**



1 October 2020

Summary of the President of the General Assembly

I. Introduction

The high-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women at the level of Heads of State and Government, convened by the President of the General Assembly, was held on Thursday, 1 October 2020, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution 73/340 and decision 74/562. The theme of the high-level meeting was “Accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, and it built upon the multi-stakeholder hearing of 21 July 2020. The high-level meeting was also guided by the theme of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations “The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism”.

The high-level meeting consisted of an opening segment, a plenary segment, and a brief closing segment.

Heads of State and Government, Ministers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, representatives of the UN system, and stakeholder representatives engaged in the summit via pre-recorded statements, livestream or in-person presentations.

Member States pledged at the highest political level to create a more equal, just and safer world to accelerate the realization of the rights of women and girls. Leaders presented concrete actions and commitments to make gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls a reality by 2030, including in support of the role of civil society organizations and youth.

The present summary was prepared by the President of the General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 73/340.

II. Key messages from the high-level meeting

The high-level meeting produced the following key messages:

- Since the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, some important gains have been made, in particular, relating to maternal mortality, girls' education, legislation specifically addressing domestic or other forms of gender-based violence against women, regulatory reforms to advance gender equality, and in political representation and participation in peace processes.
- While considerable progress has been made over the past 25 years, no country in the world has successfully achieved gender equality. The ambitious vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has not been fulfilled.
- The redistribution of power and resources between women and men in the public and private spheres has not been achieved. Women are still frequently excluded from peace negotiations, climate talks, and other decision-making roles. Meeting the unfulfilled promise of the Beijing Platform for Action is a human rights issue and a social and economic imperative.
- The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action takes place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its severe and disproportionate impact on the lives and livelihoods of women and girls in their roles as health care providers and care givers, workers in the formal and informal economy, and as teachers and learners.
- A shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls has emerged, aggravated by the social and economic upheavals of the health crisis. As the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse the hard-won gains towards gender equality that have been made over the past decades.
- It is essential that gender equality and women's leadership is placed at the center of global and national recovery efforts.

III. Opening segment

During the opening segment, statements were made by H.E. Mr. Volkan BOZKIR, President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping, President of China and representative of the host country of the Fourth World Conference of Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka, Executive Director of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Ms. Hilary Gbedemah, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Ms. Elizabeth Broderick, Chair of the Human Rights Council working Group on discrimination against women and girls, Ms. Dubravka Šimonovic, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Sascha Gabizon, Representative of Civil Society, Ms. Ixchel Adolfo, Young Women Leader, and Ms. Nomzamo Mbatha, Eminent High-Level Champion of Gender Equality.

The following gains were cited when discussing the progress made since Beijing: 274 legal and regulatory reforms in 131 countries; increased women's participation in peace processes; gender-related crimes in conflict being recognised and prosecuted under international law; increased school enrolment; advances in maternal health and bodily autonomy; recognition of the girl child and advancement on ending female genital mutilation. Recognized gains made in education and maternal mortality, and legislative reform regarding gender-based violence; as well as normative development.

During the opening session speakers discussed the need to accelerate the realization of gender equality including bridging the digital divide, providing for girls' education, facilitating equal economic opportunities for women, and ending gender-based violence. In addition, they noted the lack of progress regarding gender-based violence, child marriage, femicide, HIV, legal rights of women, discriminating norms, pay parity, and the low number of women in decision-making roles including on peace processes and climate action.

Speakers underlined the threat to gender equality posed by COVID-19 and noted the special needs of women in response and recovery. In addition, they drew attention to the frontline healthcare workers – the majority of whom are women – and called for special attention to be paid to the health, social and mental needs of women on the frontline.

Reference was also made regarding the pushback against human rights system and the financial crisis of the United Nations, urged all to strengthen human rights treaty bodies in line with General Assembly resolution 68/268. An emerging trend of discriminatory paths of constitutions and discriminatory laws was also identified.

Speakers drew attention to the persisting discrimination against women and girls, the impunity of perpetrators, and the impact of anti-gender equality actors across all regions and noted the regress in many countries particularly on sexual and reproductive health rights, sexual and gender-based violence, the imprisonment and assassination of women human rights defenders, indigenous women, women of colour and transwomen.

It was stated that gender-based violence is a structural pandemic which is invisible, unreported and normalized and includes new forms of violence such as cyberattacks, obstetric violence, and violence against women in politics.

Speakers noted the importance of the implementation of a global plan on violence against women, and the harmonization of international laws and standards; proposed violence against women as a standing item on the Commission on the Status of Women and guidance towards implementation strategies; advocated for a system-wide approach to combat violence against women; and noted the importance of a guide on the implementation of CEDAW General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women or Optional Protocol on gender-based violence of CEDAW; establishment of femicide watch at national, regional and international level.

The particular vulnerabilities of displaced women and girls including refugees were flagged, noting that more than half of displaced persons are women and girls at risk of discrimination, gender-based violence, child marriage, and lack of access to quality education and a lack of opportunities for economic empowerment.

Speakers urged Member States, civil society, and all individuals to address biases and structural obstacles to gender equality in order to uphold our collective responsibility to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. To this end, speakers cited additional existing vehicles for change such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, the Istanbul Convention, the Spotlight Initiative, the Global Compact on Refugees, the #MeToo movement, and the Generation Equality Forum. Speakers also implored all stakeholders to partner for progress, to open up consultations and create spaces for intergenerational dialogue facilitating youth voices.

IV. Plenary

The main issues addressed by States Members of the United Nations are noted as follows.

Championing institutional arrangements and mainstreaming a gender perspective in national policies/interventions

Member States referenced a range of national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the national level support the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and national gender equality policies and strategies. Speakers noted that such national gender equality mechanisms are most impactful when equipped with adequate technical and financial resources and sufficient authority to discharge their mandates effectively, through cooperative relationships with branches and levels of government, and collaboration with other institutions and non-governmental actors.

Member States shared experience of:

- Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls which coordinate, and serve as catalysts for, the implementation of the Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming in all public policies and budgets;
- Undertaking legal reform and mainstreaming a gender perspective into national laws, policies, strategies, and national development plans and interventions;
- Strengthening gender equality units and secretariats of women, in all branches of government and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, to ensure gender mainstreaming across government action;
- Updating and implementing national strategies and action plans on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;
- Systematically implementing gender-responsive budgeting and allocation of public resources through national laws and policies on financing that integrate a gender dimension in every stage of the budgeting process, with national institutions leading implementation and conducting gender impact analysis;
- Centralising gender equality in international development cooperation and integrating gender equality in COVID-19 national recovery plans.

Addressing all forms of violence against women and girls

Many interventions referenced the increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, including: violence against women and girls; conflict-related sexual violence; domestic violence; and intimate partner violence.

Member States noted that stronger data is essential to effectively inform evidence-based programming and address the root causes of violence against women and girls. Many cited accountability mechanisms implemented to monitor and evaluate ongoing programmes and activities which many noted are complemented by the full implementation of international legal frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Istanbul Convention and the Convention of Belem do Para.

Member States pledged to:

- Enact new legislation to criminalize different forms of violence against women;
- Provide comprehensive support services to survivors of gender-based violence and abuse, including investment in rehabilitation shelters, and emergency hotlines and establishing survivor friendly reporting systems for cases of domestic violence;
- Tackle impunity vis a vis prosecution, well-trained police units, and sex offenders' registers;
- Scale-up prevention efforts, and eliminate female genital mutilation, child marriage, and other harmful practices;
- Engage men and boys as key stakeholders;
- Reaching out to religious and traditional leaders to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Promoting girls' education

There was widespread affirmation that universal access to quality education and training, and lifelong learning are key to women's economic empowerment and participation in public life. Member States referenced significant gains which have been achieved through legislative and regulatory reforms, increased financing, and technology. Member States acknowledged the need to increase the numbers of girls and women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics which are critical areas for development and advancement.

Specific reference was made to the following actions:

- Eliminating tuition fees in public secondary schools and provision of menstrual hygiene facilities and services such as free sanitary towels for girls in schools;
- Implementing laws, policies and strategies that protect adolescent girls' right to stay in school during pregnancy and ensure that young mothers can return to school to complete their education;
- Raising awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and early pregnancy, and encouraging girls with children to stay in school and finish their education;
- Increasing the number of girls and women in STEM/ICT studies, across a broad range of fields and career opportunities beyond low-paying jobs;
- Building the digital skills of women and girls as part of the COVID-19 recovery efforts, including through regional coalitions.

Accelerating women's participation in power and decision-making

Member States acknowledged the steady increase of women's political participation but noted that women remain underrepresented in decision-making at all levels of government. Many speakers called for parity in all spheres, including elected positions as public representatives, corporate boards and throughout the economy. Moreover, speakers noted the need to include women as beneficiaries of COVID-19 fiscal stimulus packages, ensure the full engagement of women in all peace processes, and to close the digital divide.

A range of tools, methods and approaches have proved effective in addressing the persistent underrepresentation of women, through deliberate action such as:

- Adopting temporary special measures, pursuing legal reforms, and introducing parity requirements in electoral codes in order to accelerate the representation of women in national and local political and decision-making bodies;
- Adhering to gender balance for all appointed positions in the: executive branch of government, the judiciary and public service; international and regional organizations; designation of representatives; agendas in fields such as climate action and humanitarian support;
- Requiring and incentivizing the private sector to increase women's representation in leadership positions, corporate boards and other decision-making structures;
- Enhancing collaboration with civil society to create safe spaces for women and girls to exercise voice and leadership and ensure enjoyment of their human rights;
- Personal commitment of business and political leaders.

Improving women's health, including sexual and reproductive health

Interventions noted that the high-level meeting took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the need for universal health coverage and the need for access to health services for women. Many speakers noted the importance of including sexual and reproductive health and rights, as part of comprehensive information, social protection and public services policies and programmes that are non-discriminatory and respond to the needs of women across the life cycle; as well as expanding women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, increasing rates of assisted births and enhancing access to contraception.

In particular, Member States shared their experience of:

- Allocating resources in national budgets to improve women's access to water, sanitation and hygiene;
- Focusing development cooperation on reducing maternal mortality and newborn and infant mortality, as well as healthcare for all.

Achieving women's economic empowerment, security and social protection

Member States focused on the need to enhance women's economic participation, especially in the formal economy and labour markets, noting that these are key areas for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Speakers referenced the global economic impact of COVID-19 which acutely affects women and girls, who are over-represented in informal and vulnerable employment as well as in the care and health sectors. The disproportionate and additional domestic work and care responsibilities placed upon women and girls were also noted by many.

Member States stated their commitment to:

- Increasing women's participation and leadership in the formal economy and across all economic sectors;
- Promoting women's equal access to financial literacy, economic assets, financial services and digital technology, while particularly targeting women and girls from marginalized groups, those living in rural and remote areas, and those working in the informal sector;
- Strengthening legal protection for women's right to work, protection from unfair dismissal due to illness or childbearing, and providing incentives for hiring women after maternity leave;
- Promoting women's labour force participation and equal pay for work of equal value;
- Enacting binding measures on pay transparency that enable women to prove that they are underpaid and can defend their rights;
- Providing special support to women entrepreneurs, including those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the form of loan facilities and access to special funds;
- Working with stakeholders, including parliamentarians, to enact legislation on land ownership for women and their access to land, and implementing policies to support implementation;
- Expanding social protection measures that benefit women, among others: paid maternity and paternity leave, expanded childcare, stronger social safety nets and pensions, and promoting work-life balance;
- Expanding support for women's entrepreneurship, including through development cooperation programmes.

Advancing the work on women, peace and security

Many Member States took the opportunity to mark the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325. Speakers affirmed that the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and in the design and implementation of peace processes contributes to lasting peaceful solutions and sustainable development. Interventions reflected upon the importance of national legislation and policies, including a growing number of National Action Plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Speakers pledged to:

- Fully involve women as equal partners in peace processes and political missions at the national, regional and international level;
- Increase the number and influence of women in peacekeeping operations and in national police and security forces in order to ensure effective peacekeeping and help to improve access to the population;
- Develop and implement national action plans on women, peace and security and position women at the centre of work to prevent and resolve conflicts;
- Ensure the safety and protection of civil society actors, including women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

V. Closing segment

H.E. Mr. Volkan BOZKIR, President of the General Assembly, concluded the summit by stating that despite significant progress since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, no country has achieved gender equality. The President noted that the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to erode hard-earned gains made in this area.

He noted that for generations, women have endured undue discrimination, marginalisation, and hardship. Calling on all Member States and stakeholders to commit to accelerating the realization of gender equality to ensure that no woman is under threat, underpaid, or underestimated for the work she carries out.

The President outlined a vision of a world where women reclaim their voices and their power and are free from denigration, abuse and oppression, and feel safe in every setting.

In conclusion, H.E. Volkan BOZKIR pledged the continued support of the United Nations to the resilient women around the world and all who strive for gender equality.
