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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” (c) Implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: (i) Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”; (ii) Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Report of the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes

Bangkok, 7-10 September 2004

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Background

1. The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes was held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, from 7 to 10 September 2004.
2. The Meeting was convened pursuant to a decision by the Commission at its fifty-seventh session in 2001 to review the implementation in Asia and the Pacific of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which had been adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held in New York in 2000. The Meeting also constituted the regional preparatory activity for the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, to be carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, to be held in New York in March 2005.
3. The Meeting was preceded by an expert group meeting held in March 2004, which set the framework of broad issues and concerns within which the 12 critical areas of concern and relevant emerging issues in the region would be evaluated.

B. Attendance

4. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Afghanistan; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; France; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; Netherlands; New Zealand; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Tonga; Turkey; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America; Vanuatu; Viet Nam; Hong Kong, China; and New Caledonia.
5. Representatives of Canada, Hungary and Sweden attended the Meeting as observers.
6. The following United Nations bodies and programmes were represented: United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Population Fund, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Human Settlements Programme and International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.
7. Representatives of the following specialized agencies were present: International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

8. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations were present: Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, International Organization for Migration and Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

9. Observers were present from non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council as well as those accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

C. Opening of the Meeting

10. In his statement, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP noted that the High-level Meeting promoted a more holistic approach to understanding the multi-faceted nature of gender concerns at the highest political level where national machineries and other government counterparts were able to recognize the value of exchange, information sharing and capacity-building across sectors, between Governments and together with civil society and private partners. He stressed that the Meeting was not only a time to reflect on the Beijing Declaration, but also a time to re-evaluate and concentrate on the actions that lead to greater gender equality, both in the region and globally.

11. The Executive Secretary stated that ESCAP remained committed to building linkages between Governments, civil society and other partners in order to encourage and strengthen channels for dialogue through regional and subregional cooperation and integration. He stressed that it was time to actively reassert support to what had been pledged 10 years previously, and as a region to remain steadfast in the ongoing pursuit of gender equality for all women and girls for decades to come.

12. On behalf of the Minister of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand, Mr. Wanlop Phloytabtim, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, extended a warm welcome to all those attending the Meeting. In his opening address, he observed that the momentous congregation of the region's leaders and advocates for women's empowerment and gender equality entailed a significant value and responsibility to revisit and reiterate the commitment to promote gender equality. Referring to the theme of the Meeting, he stated that the Government of Thailand fully supported the power of partnerships to move the gender equality agenda forward. The National Women's Development Plan of Thailand stressed partnerships within and between levels, sectors and themes, between the Government, United Nations agencies, international donors, non-governmental organizations, communities and, most importantly, with women and men.

13. The Asian and Pacific region had witnessed notable progress in many aspects of development in the past 10 years, including progress in gender relations. However, despite concerted efforts, women in general had continued to face formidable obstacles to improving their social and economic status. Much of the progress had been in the formal arena of women's human rights, for example laws, institutional mechanisms, policy frameworks and national strategies and plans of action. A number of obstacles still remained: legal and customary barriers, deep-rooted, discriminatory socio-cultural perception and practices, prevailing poverty and the challenges of globalization.

14. The Permanent Secretary reiterated the Executive Secretary's sentiment that the challenges demanded stronger and more effective partnerships and the application of strategic responses that were grounded in the relevant economic and social contexts, with the participation and ownership of both women and men. He hoped that the Meeting would be a useful forum to deliberate upon strategies and ways forward, share knowledge and experiences, resolve to make the best and widest possible use of the spirit of cooperation, experiences and innovation, and agree to accord women's empowerment and gender equality a prominent place on the Asian and Pacific national, subregional and regional agendas.

15. A statement was delivered by the Director, Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Officer in Charge, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. She placed the Meeting in the global context of 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 set by the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. She noted that there was increased commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and growing awareness of the synergies between the Platform for Action and the Convention. Future focus should be on ensuring full implementation of the Convention at the national level, including by highlighting the importance of the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

16. The Director noted that gender mainstreaming was an important global strategy and stressed that a major challenge was to ensure that gender analysis was the basis for policy development and decision-making in all areas, and that actors at all levels, women as well as men, had 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 the national level, were also required. In addition, national mechanisms for the advancement of women had important catalytic roles to play in advocating, supporting and monitoring the attention given to gender perspectives in the work of line ministries and other critical bodies at the national level. Increasing partnerships formed between Governments and civil society for the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality were creating new and important synergies and facilitating the active involvement of a broad range of stakeholders.

D. Election of officers

17. The Meeting elected Ms. Habiba Sarabi (Afghanistan), Chairperson and elected the following heads of delegation Vice-Chairpersons: Ms. Zahra Guileyava (Azerbaijan); Ms. Khurshid Zahan Haque (Bangladesh); Ms. Ing Kantha Phavi (Cambodia); Ms. Chen Xiurong (China); Ms. Adi Asenaca Caucau (Fiji); Ms. Kanti Singh (India); Ms. Nurlini Kasri (Indonesia); Mr. Aberoti Nikora (Kiribati); Ms. Beaulean Carl-Worswick (Federated States of Micronesia); Ms. Asta Laxmi Shakya (Nepal); Ms. Imelda M. Nicolas (Philippines); Ms. Eun-hee Chi (Republic of Korea); Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (Singapore); Mr. Nelson Kehe Kile (Solomon Islands); Mr. Sora-at Klinpratoom (Thailand); and Ms. Ha Thi Khiет (Viet Nam).

18. Ms. Yoriko Meguro, Representative of Japan to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and Ms. Luagalau Foisagaasina Eteuati Shon, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa, were elected joint Rapporteurs.

E. Adoption of the agenda

19. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional and global outcomes.
5. Implementation gaps and challenges ahead in the ESCAP region.
6. Approaches for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for gender equality.
7. Adoption of the report.

II. REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND ITS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OUTCOMES

20. In considering document E/ESCAP/BPA/1, "Review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional and global outcomes", the Meeting made the following observations.

21. All countries of the Asian and Pacific region reaffirmed the consensus of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000, many countries had made progress, including the formulation of national action plans to promote gender equality and empower women; the establishment of national machineries for the advancement of women; improvements in areas concerning women's health, including maternal and reproductive health and longer life expectancy; revision of domestic laws and regulations discriminating against women; affirmative measures to improve women's political participation; increased access of women to basic education and significant decrease in women's illiteracy rate; and women's economic empowerment through microcredit, microentrepreneurship development programme and income-generating activities.

A. Women and poverty

22. Almost all of the countries in the ESCAP region had introduced programmes for poverty reduction and alleviation. Income-generation schemes centring around microcredit, public works programmes (for example, food for work), technological upgrading, skills development programmes and the provision of some form of social safety nets featured not only in attempts to create income-earning opportunities for women and to broaden women's economic participation,

but also in health and education. Microcredit should integrate gender empowerment, family planning, responsible parenthood and women's health into the programmes to deliver other support services, such as health facilities, education, skills training and technology upgrading, to women in poverty. Programmes included poverty mapping, nationwide village funds, farmers' temporary debt suspension schemes, a cyber women information database incorporating the 12 critical areas of concern and articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with which to benefit all sectors working on the emancipation of women. Additionally, there were programmes addressing food security, watershed development and social forestry.

23. Several developed countries of the region had adopted measures to assist low-income families, minority and indigenous groups in improving their livelihoods and realizing their right to development. Those measures had included provisions in their national budgets for childcare facilities, income supplements and skills development programmes. Additionally, development assistance from developed countries had helped the Governments of some developing countries to provide protection and assistance in addressing issues such as violence against women, including trafficking, HIV/AIDS and access to health care and education.

B. Education and training of women

24. A wide range of policy initiatives and strategies had been adopted in the region, resulting in significant progress in promoting women's education and training. Most of those initiatives were focused on legal reforms to make primary education compulsory, the establishment of special bodies to monitor compliance with policy directives, the establishment of special commissions and committees, grants and scholarships for girl students, and the creation of public awareness at all levels. Many countries had experimented with new approaches to the eradication of female illiteracy and had established more flexible and diversified forms of education, such as half-day primary schools, part-time primary schools and girls' primary schools, in poverty-stricken areas.

25. As a consequence, gender gaps in education in several countries of the region had been reduced and very high rates of female adult literacy had been achieved in a number of countries. The Meeting was pleased to note that a number of countries were well on the way to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

26. In some countries, female enrolment rates were reportedly higher than male enrolment rates in some or all levels of education. Examples included countries where women were outperforming men in several areas of education, including having higher literacy rates, high-school completion rates and university entrance rates; the establishment of a centre for gender policy; and the development of diploma programmes in gender management and women's studies. Nevertheless, some countries in the region had a long way to go before parity between the genders was reached at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

27. Access to vocational training and opportunities to acquire know-how and skills, especially at the higher level, remained a precondition for women to acquire new skills and

secure entry into higher levels of responsibility in business, academia, professional bodies and public offices. Several countries had introduced vocational training programmes to impart new and emerging skills to women and lifelong training for girls and women so that their skills and experiences remained relevant in a fast-changing environment. In addition, motivational and counselling programmes to encourage girls to choose careers in the fields of science and technology had been undertaken. Women, however, continued to face difficulties in gaining entry into those fields owing to a variety of factors, including gender stereotyping.

C. Women and health

28. In many countries, Governments had forged close partnerships with non-governmental organizations in delivering basic health-care services to women and children and had succeeded in developing broad-based health-care facilities, in both the rural and the urban sectors. Measures had also been adopted to provide antenatal care, domiciliary delivery, post-natal care, child health care, pre-school and school health services, family planning, health education, nutrition activities (including nutrition education and nutrition surveillance) where those had not previously existed.

29. Visible progress had been made in improving female life expectancy and reducing maternal mortality and morbidity rates in several countries of the region. Several countries had also launched education and information campaigns on HIV and AIDS.

D. Violence against women

30. Several countries had paid increased attention to the issue of violence against women in all its forms. Measures adopted included the establishment of a national commission for the elimination of violence against women, enactment of new constitutional provisions and development of a national plan of action advocating a policy of “zero-tolerance” where the issue of victims of violence and armed conflict had emerged as a critical concern. Campaigns on the elimination of violence against women as part of public awareness-raising and education had also been initiated. Government actions to combat violence against women had involved working in closer cooperation with a range of civil society actors, and in some recent innovative cases with the business sector.

31. Rape and sexual violence against women in the community were being increasingly addressed through legal reforms that would increase penalties for sexual violence. In some countries, recent amendments to penal laws had included punishment of perpetrators. Some countries noted that steps needed to be taken to eliminate the demand market for prostitution and pornography to eliminate trafficking.

32. Sexual harassment in the workplace was receiving increased attention. Sexual harassment was gradually being covered in penal laws and in employment legislation. In some subregions, trafficking in women and girls was a rapidly expanding multifaceted problem of mounting concern, which required expanded and strengthened interventions at national, subregional and international levels, strong political will and partnership within the region.

33. In the area of violence in the family, some developed as well as developing countries had expanded their activities with Governments playing a strong leadership role in the formulation of policies for the prevention of domestic violence. Specific laws on domestic violence had been enacted in several countries to provide protection of women and offer legal remedies. Some countries had taken action to create a more supportive environment for women victims and to make investigative procedures more women-friendly. Women police desks had been created and gender sensitization training had been initiated for law enforcers and other key actors. Support services had been strengthened in the areas of medical and counselling support, legal aid and financial and housing assistance, including increasing the number of shelters and homes. It was noted, however, that in a number of countries progress was too slow, given the lack of enforcement of laws and of harmonization between laws and social stigmas attached to the victims, their families and communities. Nevertheless, it was widely believed in many societies of the region that violence in the home was a private affair and that senior guardians had the unlimited right to use physical punishment towards women and children.

E. Women and armed conflict

34. Violence against women in situations of civil strife and war was a prevalent human rights violation in some countries. The need for effective institutional arrangements to guarantee protection of women from armed conflicts and participation in the peace process as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was recognized. It was noted that women had been and still were to a serious degree excluded from proper involvement in the processes of peace negotiations, reconciliation and reconstruction.

F. Women and the economy

35. The Beijing Platform for Action had put strong emphasis on the need to promote women's skills and access to markets, information and technology to enhance their participation in the economy. Several countries of the region had introduced new educational and skills development programmes and strengthened other mechanisms to promote women's access to credit, markets, information and technology. Vocational training programmes of varying scale had been strengthened to improve the professional skills of women. Some countries had introduced measures to ascertain objectively the conditions of women in unpaid work, through improved statistics, research and gender-responsive budgeting.

G. Women in power and decision-making

36. Since Beijing, the presence of women in positions of leadership had slowly but steadily increased in the sphere of politics in a number of countries. Some countries reported that women's leadership had increased at the national assembly, senate and cabinet levels. The strides made in women's political participation in decision-making levels were highlighted. However, in some countries, the number of women representatives at the senior decision-making level remained low in the national parliament and the Government.

37. The adoption of affirmative action policies which reserved quotas for women in politics could result in the increased representation and participation of women in grass-roots democratic

institutions. In some countries, the reservation of one third of local village and municipal body and council seats for women had resulted in a “quiet revolution” as women had significantly increased their participation in grass-roots democratic institutions. In other countries, laws combined with awareness programmes and leadership training had been provided to ensure more equitable representation at various levels of Government. In public service, there had been a visible increase in women’s access to the decision-making process. The decentralization of administrative power as well as policies to provide women equal access to and opportunity in local administrative positions had facilitated that process. There was a need to create and enhance mechanisms to promote the meaningful participation of all women in governance, especially young women, at all levels of decision-making and specifically support youth-led initiatives so that women could advance their rights.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

38. At the institutional level, all Governments had demonstrated their political will through (a) the adoption of national plans of action to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, incorporating all or most of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action; and the establishment of implementation structures such as national coordinating committees. In some countries, however, national action plans had not been translated into action or incorporated in national development plans; and (b) the strengthening of national institutional mechanisms, as evidenced by the upgrading of the location of the national focal points within the government structure. Many countries had also supplemented those subnational units at the provincial, district or village level, and had linkages with focal points in other ministries.

I. Women and the media

39. To eliminate traditional gender biases and derogatory representations of women in the media and the new communication technology, including the Internet, gender-sensitive programming needed to be promoted. Some countries encouraged media professionals to take up the challenge to break the mould and portray women as individual human beings with a sense of dignity. Media strategies to build a positive image of women and eliminate their negative portrayal had been observed, such as sensitizing the media and barring the circulation of obscene and pornographic images and publications. However, freedom of the mass media was important to build a democratic society. Constructive changes should come from the media professionals. For that goal and beyond, it was considered essential to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and the new communication technologies. There was a need for creating an environment to train women in, and enable them to make full use of, information technology.

J. The girl child

40. Among all the areas concerning the girl child, notable development had been seen in education. Most countries reported that they had attained equal enrolment among boys and girls at the primary school level and had seen improvements at the secondary and tertiary levels. A few countries reported that female students outnumbered male students in non-traditional subject areas and post- secondary level education, although girls in several countries were still

disadvantaged at the higher education level. That was often due to negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls. Girls continued to be underrepresented in non-traditional areas such as science and technology. To overcome that disparity, some countries had initiated awareness and counselling programmes to encourage girls to choose careers in those non-traditional fields.

41. In combating violence against the girl child, several countries had adopted certain measures, offering scholarships and providing free education as preventive measures against the trafficking and exploitation of children. Some countries had established legal and institutional mechanisms to safeguard children against all forms of violence. Yet, a number of Governments acknowledged that the rights of the girl child in their countries remained violated in several respects. They acknowledged the need for more comprehensive approaches to ensure the right to life, participation and development for girl children.

K. Human rights and women

42. Most countries in the Asian and Pacific region had ratified or were in the process of ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Some countries had recently removed clauses of reservation. Similarly, most countries in the region had been preparing and submitting periodic reports to the Committee. That had been a useful process for monitoring the impact of the Beijing Platform for Action in the advancement of the status of women. Additionally, a number of countries had ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary protocols. In another affirmation, many countries had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the adoption of those protocols was an important step in developing jurisprudence on women's human rights as it strengthened the Convention.

43. A number of countries had reported on measures reflecting a rights-based approach. An example in point was the promotion of zero tolerance for gender-based violence and harmful practices. Customs that were considered harmful included female genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, son preference and restrictions on women's mobility. It was also pointed out that anti-trafficking legislation must embrace a human rights approach and protect the rights of those most vulnerable to abuse.

L. Women and the environment

44. The Meeting took note of the critical linkage between the environmental changes and the role of women as natural resource managers and providers. A number of countries reported that the opportunities for women's access to and participation in the management of natural resources and promotion of sustainable development had been broadened in the past few years. Examples included community-based forest management programmes and community-based water management.

III. IMPLEMENTATION GAPS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD IN THE ESCAP REGION

45. The Meeting considered document E/ESCAP/BPA/2, "Implementation gaps and challenges ahead in the ESCAP region", and made the following observations.

46. Despite the many achievements in the region vis-à-vis the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, several countries identified some common gaps and challenges that were persisting, such as women's disproportionate representation among the poor; the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among women; the low level of women's participation in decision-making at various levels; all forms of violence against women, including trafficking in women and children; addressing the gender-negative impacts of globalization and trade liberalization such as job insecurity and unemployment with the end of the Multifibre Arrangement and violations of labour rights; gender stereotyping; and the lack of reliable and relevant sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. Internal political conflict was also referred to as a cause of negative effects on women's lives and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

A. Women and poverty

47. The ESCAP region as a whole had been able to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in the past few decades. However, it was still home to the largest number of poor in the world. It was a matter of concern that, in many countries, women figured disproportionately among the poor. Women living in situations of extreme deprivation were highly vulnerable to internal as well as external shocks. Several countries faced to varying degrees the effects of absolute and relative poverty, aggravated, if not wholly caused, by the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. Vast numbers of women in the affected countries had been forced to resume their traditional role in the unpaid and largely invisible household economy or had resorted to informal sector employment.

48. Poverty affected different members of a household differently. Poor women, particularly those in female-headed households, tended to bear the main burden of poverty. Inequalities also existed across gender in the distribution of productive resources and access to economic opportunities. In poor households, men and women experienced poverty differently. There was a lack of systematic legal and economic measures to secure land rights for women. There was a need for adequate social protection measures.

B. Education and training of women

49. The Meeting noted that, although much had been achieved in terms of addressing the gender gaps in education, some least developed countries and developing countries still had very low female literacy rates and faced severe constraints in mobilizing sufficient resources for investing in female literacy programmes.

50. It was a matter of concern that women in many developing countries continued to face difficulties in accessing educational and training opportunities. In many instances, women fared less favourably compared with men in terms of accessing those opportunities owing to obstacles

such as parental perceptions and society's attitudes towards women's education and skill formation and lack of reproductive health choices. External shocks and economic crises compounded those difficulties and had a discouraging effect on women's education.

51. More needed to be done in private sector businesses to take advantage of the investment in women's education and training to promote women affirmatively to positions of leadership. Although institutional practices and barriers were slow to change, some developed countries reported government initiatives in partnership with the private sector to train women for assuming responsible positions in the boardrooms through mentoring and training activities.

C. Women and health

52. The Meeting noted with concern a variety of factors that continued to impede women's right to health in general and their reproductive rights in particular. Those included women's rights to reproductive health services and sexual health services. Gender, combined with geographical location, social class and ethnicity, constituted powerful barriers. Maternal mortality remained high in many countries as primary health-care services had experienced cutbacks in resources. Lack of control in the area of sexual and reproductive health prevented many women and girls from improving their status and exercising autonomy in their personal lives, including decisions regarding marriage, family planning and use of health services. Limited access to reliable information on family planning services and to other services necessary for full reproductive health also acted as a powerful barrier to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, the availability, affordability and slow development of, and inaccessibility to, quality services had acted as powerful barriers for realizing the needs and rights of women and girl children, especially those of poor women. Those included high-quality care systems such as delivery by skilled birth attendants, timely referral and transport, safe management of complications, comprehensive obstetric care and user-friendly campaigns, and high-quality care and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

53. Women with disabilities faced many barriers, especially in the area of health. From childhood, many were deprived of their self-determination, and became victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse in institutions and the workplace. Women with disabilities had been denied maternal rights because of their disability. General Recommendation No. 18 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women included the need to take measures in the areas of employment, education, health services and social security for disabled women. General Recommendation No. 24 gave special attention to the health needs and rights of women with disabilities. Additionally, the Meeting noted that as part of the human rights framework, the State needed to respect, protect, fulfil and promote reproductive and sexual health for all, including young, disabled, indigenous and other marginalized groups.

54. The Meeting noted that the social and economic factors that made women particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS needed to be addressed rather than HIV/AIDS prevention in isolation. The Meeting also noted that HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence needed to be addressed in reproductive health services. Governments must ensure that user fees were abolished where imposed on the poor for reproductive health services, particularly for emergency medical obstetric care, antenatal care and post-natal care, and family planning services.

D. Violence against women

55. Several countries reported that violence against women in all its forms, including violence during internal strife and armed conflict and domestic violence, trafficking in women and girls, spousal abuse, harmful practices and sexual abuse, was a grave social problem. Concern was expressed that such violence might irreparably damage the reproductive and sexual health of women and girls. The issues needed to be viewed as a human rights concern.

E. Women and armed conflict

56. The Meeting noted with concern the situations of conflict in some countries in the region and the serious impact on the rights and livelihoods of women and children in particular. Militarism, war and armed conflict were also referred to as having a negative effect on women's lives and the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

57. Years of armed conflict in Afghanistan had severely affected the situation of women in the country. The conflict had also damaged the country's statistical capacity. Thus, in statistical terms, very little was known about the status of women in Afghanistan. Additionally, figures for women's life expectancy, poverty, maternal mortality and morbidity were disturbing. Almost half the deaths among Afghan women in the reproductive age group were from pregnancy and childbirth complications. Poverty, lack of access to health facilities and emergency obstetric care, early marriage and childbearing, high fertility, lack of antenatal and post-natal care, and poor nutrition were among the health problems that continued to plague women in Afghanistan.

F. Women and the economy

58. It was a matter of deep concern that discriminatory practices, where those existed, continued in both the formal and informal sectors, created wage differentials, and hampered promotions, access to education and training opportunities and occupational mobility. Such discrimination went against the spirit and the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action. Moreover, women working in the informal sector seldom enjoyed any legal or social protection. Several best practices had been adopted in a number of countries to discourage and overcome discriminatory practices in the labour market, including measures to assist employers in issuing non-discriminatory job advertisements, prohibition of sexual harassment to protect female employees and revision of equal employment opportunity law to remove discrimination with regard to maternity leave, restrictions on overtime work, holiday work and night work by women.

59. Women's economic empowerment involved the provision of a reasonable degree of financial autonomy and independence, and participation in economic decision-making with regard to matters ranging from macropolicies and macroprogrammes to household-level disbursements or disposition of income and resources. It also rested on the recognition and valuation of women's unpaid work which maintained and supported the family and society. Women's economic empowerment also involved security of employment, working environments that were safe from physical health hazards as well as sexual harassment, and work contracts that

were drawn up in accordance with international labour standards. Additional fundamental elements of women's economic empowerment were freedom from fear of traffickers of women and punishment for those involved in trafficking in any capacity, legal rights as migrants, and child labour rights, particularly of girls.

60. The feminization of migration presented formidable challenges for countries of origin and destination. Women migrant workers were vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Those problems were compounded for women workers in irregular situations and those who were trafficked. The trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation was particularly serious in several subregions of the Asian and Pacific region. Greater official commitment and arrangements by sending countries were called for, including a clear policy for the safe and legal migration of women workers and enhanced cooperation between sending and receiving countries to promote the protection of such workers.

61. Additionally, access to and control over resources, including skills that would allow and enable women to engage in various economic enterprises, particularly in high-value, high-return activities, were vitally important.

62. Globalization and increased interdependence had begun to have a decisive impact on the economic and political relationships between countries of the region. Globalization had brought significant opportunities as well as difficult challenges. Access to external resources, trade opportunities and new forms of technology had contributed significantly to the economic growth in the region, bringing expanded opportunities for women's economic and social advancement. Globalization had also made the countries of the region more vulnerable to external shocks. Disadvantaged groups such as women faced greater insecurity in urban and rural employment markets and marginalization in the agricultural sector. Reference had been made to the need to develop innovative concepts and a global, fair and just environment sufficiently capable of responding to the new dynamics as well as the negative effects resulting from globalization. It was also important to integrate gender analysis into macroeconomic development processes. That would require emphasis on fiscal and trade processes. In trade, it was important not only to understand the gender implications of trade issues, but also to emphasize increased participation of women in trade negotiations.

G. Women in power and decision-making

63. The impact of the Fourth World Conference on Women had spread through national political thinking, as shown in the progress achieved in areas such as (a) the increase in the number of women running as candidates and winning elections, (b) quotas or reservation systems established by Governments and political parties, (c) training in self-confidence and political skills provided by non-governmental organizations, (d) cooperation among Governments, non-governmental organizations and other sectors working for women's issues and (e) mainstreaming of gender issues in national development plans, including measures to foster women's political development. Despite the progress made, the target of achieving 30 per cent representation of women in decision-making positions by 2005, as stipulated by the United Nations, appeared to be beyond the reach of many countries in the region. The obstacles to achieving that goal included the pervasive influence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes that restricted

women's political participation and the persisting institutional barriers that existed across various socio-political institutions, such as lack of a critical mass of women in politics. The stereotypical and traditional expectations of women in society and lack of training and mentoring often made women doubt their suitability for high-level positions.

64. Institutional changes were also necessary to facilitate an increase in women's representation and decision-making in all areas of the mainstream development agenda. Institutionalization of gender analysis, gender statistics and other techniques of gender mainstreaming required increased attention.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

65. Some national machineries in several developing countries appeared to be marginalized in the national planning and policy-making process and were often under-resourced. The limitation of financial and human resources for promoting gender equality was an issue for developed countries as well. Mainstreaming as a systematic approach to ensure gender-responsive implementation of policies and plans had not yet been institutionalized in most countries. A number of women's machineries had yet to be enabled to play a catalytic and lead role in mainstreaming gender into sector policies and programmes.

I. Women and the media

66. Despite the repeated emphases on the necessity for a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, images of women as inferior beings or, worse, as sexual objects and commodities, were still prevalent. Such portrayals caused continuous reinforcement of the stereotypical and traditional roles of women.

J. The girl child

67. In many countries, the girl child suffered from the combined effects of poverty, resulting in malnutrition, a lack of education and low self-esteem, thereby limiting the potential of girls. In that context, the girl child was vulnerable to various forms of abuse in the family and in the streets, including hazardous child labour, juvenile prostitution and pornography. In situations of conflict, her vulnerability was acute.

K. Human rights and women

68. Several countries noted that one of the main human rights frameworks that was relevant for the rights-based approach was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The promotion of women's rights as human rights, including the mainstreaming of those rights in decision-making processes, was one of the main objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that context, ratification and implementation of the Convention had become an important instrument in empowering women in the region. The harmonization of national and customary laws vis-à-vis the Convention remained a challenge. Steps needed to be taken to continue to implement the Convention at the national level, in a way that facilitated the process of monitoring the Beijing Platform for Action.

69. It was pointed out that the strengthened involvement of countries, particularly in the Pacific subregion, in the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was needed as a way of promoting the ratification and awareness of the Convention in the subregion. Clarification was sought as to how the Committee members were elected.

L. Women and the environment

70. The degradation of the environment was a major concern for both rural and urban women, including tribal and indigenous women, as it affected their survival and livelihood. The massive and continued use of fertilizers in food production posed serious health risks to women. There was a need to promote local and indigenous environment-friendly production processes and management of resources.

M. Other issues

71. Some countries noted that, in the Asian and Pacific region, there were active non-governmental organization partnerships and networking on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, a trend which had begun even before the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. However, in reviewing partnerships for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and for women's empowerment, some common problems emerged in governmental and non-governmental organization partnerships and in collaboration between non-government actors and organizations. Among those were the following: (a) the short-term nature of the partnership and collaboration; (b) the lack of mechanisms for sustaining partnerships; (c) problems of representativeness of participants; and (d) distrust or ambivalence over the partnership relationship and agendas.

72. The Meeting noted that monitoring and evaluation at the national, regional and international levels had become key strategies in programme and project management for the empowerment of women. Systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was of paramount importance for the attainment of the short-, medium- and long-term goals and thus would eventually lead to the empowerment of women. Reporting in the Asian and Pacific region usually followed a process of planning, execution and administration of activities; reporting to higher units or funding agencies; sharing reports with a wider audience; using indicators to measure success; and instituting monitoring procedures. There was a continuing need to assess the reporting structures and identify their problems, including reporting overload along with the need for the rationalization of reports at the country level, consolidation by the United Nations agencies of needed data, consolidation of reporting formats, reduction and frequency of reports and the need for online databases. To strengthen monitoring and evaluation, there was an ongoing need to follow systematic use of gender-sensitive indicators, divided into enabling or input indicators, performance indicators and progress indicators, including innovative process-oriented and outcome indicators of a qualitative nature.

IV. APPROACHES FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

73. The Meeting had before it document E/ESCAP/BPA/3, "Approaches for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for gender equality".

74. A panel discussion was held at the Meeting focusing on the approaches necessary for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for the empowerment of women. The approaches discussed were gender mainstreaming, partnerships and regional cooperation, a rights-based approach and working with men. Summaries of the panel presentations are contained in annex I to the present report.

75. The Meeting renewed its commitment made to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

76. The Meeting acknowledged the region's achievements in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, including the formulation of national action plans, establishment of national machineries for gender equality and women's advancement, progress made in the areas of women's health, revision of legal provisions, women's political participation, education and the economic empowerment of women.

77. The Meeting further identified gaps that called for immediate measures in order to realize fuller implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Those included lack of institutional and coordination capacity of the national machineries and their limited role in decision-making bodies, and insufficient allocation of financial and human resources for the promotion of gender equality. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the areas where further action was required, such as gender and HIV/AIDS, protection of women migrant workers' human rights, prevailing violence against women, curtailed participation of women in political decision-making, and collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics.

78. Henceforth, the challenges that needed to be addressed in order to fill the gaps included the need for the creation of an enabling policy environment including strengthening the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming mechanisms and necessary resources, developing gender indicators and forging closer cooperation and partnerships with stakeholders. Some pertinent issues identified in the context of remaining challenges included gender and HIV/AIDS, the impacts of globalization and trade liberalization, women migrant workers and armed conflict.

79. The Meeting recognized that cooperation and partnerships involving non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, religious leaders and community-based organizations, were crucial for policy formulation as they facilitated and accelerated the coordinated and enhanced implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals and other national development goals.

V. ADOPTION OF THE BANGKOK COMMUNIQUÉ

80. The draft Bangkok Communiqué, a forward-looking statement reaffirming the Beijing Platform for Action and the further measures of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, was brought to the plenary for review.

81. The Communiqué called for the fuller implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further measures of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, recognizing the importance of strengthening cooperation and partnerships, and the commitment to allocating increased resources by Governments, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and regional, international and intergovernmental agencies.

82. BANGKOK COMMUNIQUÉ

The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes was held in Bangkok from 7 to 10 September 2004, and was attended by 44 members and associate members of ESCAP, United Nations bodies, programmes and specialized agencies, representatives of intergovernmental agencies and observers from non-governmental organizations.

WE REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT to the consensus Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE the gains made including:

- The formulation of national policies and action plans to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- The establishment and the strengthening of national machineries or institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.
- Improved women's health, including maternal and reproductive and sexual health, nutritional status and longer life expectancy.
- The formulation and revision of domestic laws and regulations to eliminate discrimination against women.
- Affirmative actions to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making.
- Increased access by women to education and a significant decrease in women's illiteracy rate.
- Improved economic empowerment of women.
- Active and enhanced participation of women's non-governmental organizations and civil society.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE GAPS in the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, including:

- The insufficient catalytic role of national machineries for the advancement of women in the national planning and policy-making process.
- The lack of policies, legislations and programmes to protect women migrant workers' human rights.
- The lack of reproductive health information and services or care to women, particularly young women and adolescents.
- The lack of regional cooperation and partnership initiatives for combating trafficking in persons, HIV/AIDS and promoting the protection of women migrant workers and global market mechanisms.
- The limitation of financial and human resources for promoting gender equality.
- Women's disproportionate representation among the poor (feminization of poverty).
- The high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the region particularly among women.
- The low level of women's participation in decision-making at various levels.
- The persisting violence against women including trafficking of women and children and girl child marriage.
- The lack of reliable and relevant sex and age disaggregated data and gender statistics.
- The persisting portrayal of women and girls as sexual objects and commodities in media and information and communication technology.

WE RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:

- Combating continuing violation of human rights and all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- Strengthening of women's national machineries and institutional mechanisms.
- Improving allocation of financial and human resources and increasing allocation of financial resources.
- Developing gender-sensitive indicators and sex disaggregated statistics for measuring progress.
- Forging close cooperation and partnership with stakeholders.
- Creating an enabling environment to support policies and affirmative action programmes to ensure women's access to economic resources and opportunities, education and health, and including reproductive health.
- Increasing the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of reproductive health services, especially for poor, young and marginalized women.
- Reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS.
- Promoting gender mainstreaming as a systematic approach to ensure gender-responsive implementation of policies and plans to be institutionalized.
- Addressing the negative impacts of globalization and trade liberalization such as job insecurity and violations of labour rights.
- Providing adequate social and legislative protection to vulnerable women.
- Reducing and alleviating poverty.
- Supporting and recognizing community and independent media to counter the negative and stereotypical portrayal of women and girls.

- Protecting women and children in situations arising from militarism, war and armed conflict, and in particular, from the use of rape and sexual violence and hostage-taking as a strategy of war.
- Mainstreaming of women in environmental decision-making at all levels in the context of environmental degradation and pollution, climate change, and their impact on gender.

FURTHERMORE, WE RECOGNIZE the importance of ensuring linkages and cross-fertilization with commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration, the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, which are recognized as effective in realizing women's human rights and gender equality.

WE ENCOURAGE the strengthening of cooperation and partnerships, and the commitment to allocating increased resources by governments, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and regional, international and intergovernmental agencies.

WE THEREFORE RENEW OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FULL AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION.

WE OFFER THIS COMMUNIQUÉ AS THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE MEETING ON THE GLOBAL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AT ITS FORTY-NINTH SESSION TO BE HELD IN NEW YORK IN MARCH 2005.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

83. The Meeting adopted the report containing the Bangkok Communiqué on 10 September 2004 and requested the secretariat to transmit the report to the Commission on the Status of Women. The report constituted the input of the Asian and Pacific region to the forthcoming forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in New York in March 2005, at which the Commission would carry out the global review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Annex I

Summary of panel presentations

PANEL I

Ms. Jayati Ghosh noted that following the Beijing Conference, the region had undergone many changes, with accelerated economic growth and equally rapid economic declines, as well as enormous shifts in employment patterns. The labour market in the region witnessed a rapid increase in the number of women entering the paid labour force, especially in the export industry. Since the late 1990s, however, an increasing number of women had had to move from the paid labour force into unpaid domestic work and the informal sector. As a result, the region experienced a very large increase in women's economic migration, among other things. Most nations in the region were currently operating far below their economic potential, with labour supply well in excess of labour demand, and there had been a sharp decline in the female formal labour force participation rate across the entire region. Women's paid work had decreased substantially and had been replaced by less permanent, more part-time and unpaid work, and increased subcontracting and outsourcing, there had also been a marked increase in women's informal sector employment, especially in the domestic and public services, the care and entertainment industries, all of which had contributed to relative deprivation and vulnerabilities to exploitation. Governments faced the challenge of ensuring protection of female migrants' rights and ensuring that the market could overcome the negative effects of global economic slumps more adequately. In particular, macroeconomic policies should be anti-cyclical and focused on employment generation rather than simply inflation control. There should be an increased focus on employment generation in the formal labour sector for women and adequate female labour protection. Lastly, women's equal access to economic resources such as land, credit and vocational and technological training must be ensured to reverse the recent trends in increases in female labour migration, exploitative labour conditions and an overall decrease in the female paid labour force.

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy emphasized that there had been many gains regarding violence against women and trafficking, especially as the former had become a centrepiece of the women's international movement after the Beijing Conference, the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. There had been marked triumphs in ways that those international developments had been catalysts for change in national policies and laws, such as the recognition of violence against women and sexual violence in armed conflict, and the increased focus on trafficking as a serious human rights issue to be addressed, following the adoption by several Governments of the 2000 optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Despite such gains, there were persistent challenges to implement the standards and policies recommended in all declarations and conventions addressing violence against women. Increased attention must be paid to monitoring trends and situations of violence against women. A second challenge was the issue of cultural relativism and cultural rights in relationship to women's rights. Asian values were not more tolerant of violence against women than Western liberal values, yet there were still very harmful cultural practices that violated women's human rights in some countries in the region. Countries

must also work towards women's economic empowerment as well as women's sexual autonomy to combat violence against women in the region. Trafficking must be seen as an aspect of migration. Strong laws and policies were needed to combat trafficking, yet that should not hinder regular economic migration or women's rights to cross borders in search of economic opportunities or to escape negative conditions in their own communities.

Ms. Nancy Hafkin noted that gender differences continued to be largely ignored in information and communication technology (ICT) advances, although the five-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had recommended actions to be taken to develop initiatives to give women greater access to ICTs and give them access to the gains offered by ICT. The growth of ICT had been uneven in other ways. It had been concentrated in urban areas and wealthier countries. There was a need to ensure that new technologies promoted gender equality and did not perpetuate or create additional gender disadvantages. Specific attention must be paid to gender issues to ensure that the effective use of ICT improved the lives and livelihoods of all citizens and alleviated poverty. Countries must encourage more women to participate in ICT decision-making, promote women's increased access to technological training and capacity-building, increase the collection of gender disaggregated indicators and targets, as well as focus on combating sexual exploitation over the Internet. Women's e-commerce opportunities must be increased, and policy makers as well as gender advocates must become more aware of ICT issues.

Ms. Socorro Reyes discussed the need for greater efforts to fulfil previous commitments made by Governments outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and during the five-year review and appraisal. Political participation was a human right and as such Governments were duly bound to build an environment to ensure that women's political participation was effective and sustainable. Governments had made significant commitments to increase women's political participation in all areas of governance and particularly in decision-making. However, given the current rate of women's representation between 1995 and 2004, it would take approximately 58 years to achieve gender balance in women's parliamentary participation. Additionally, using the players-process-product framework it was stressed that, while increased numbers of women in local and national governing institutions was key, access alone would not guarantee women's effective participation in the political process. It was important to support women's involvement before and after elections, including leadership training, the use of quotas, the use of "zebra party lists" where male and female candidates were listed alternately, and engaging women in multi-stakeholder consultations to allow them to build a constituency. Additionally, relating to the products of decision-making, such as policy measures, the effectiveness of women politicians to address gender in development objectives required assistance in policy formulation, gender-responsive budgetary allocation, monitoring of implementation and evaluation of outcomes, including numerical and time-bound targets.

Ms. Maire Bopp Du Pont reviewed the various obstacles and traditional norms associated with women's sexuality, reproductive health and common gender biases women faced within relationships, and from society more generally, relating to sexuality and reproductive health. The panelist gave personal insights into the impact of HIV/AIDS on women in Asia, and particularly the Pacific. The invisible nature of the spread of HIV/AIDS was due to the fact that a large percentage of women infected with HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific were normally considered

“low risk”. Over 80 per cent of those women infected were in relationships traditionally considered monogamous, such as marriage, and had been infected by their husbands or partners. There were limitations in policy and programming structures to respond to the varied and often compounded gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS. Women’s lower economic and social status in many societies restricted their ability to discuss issues of infidelity, leave risky relationships, negotiate condom use or refuse sex. Therefore, practical strategies to lessen the infection rate and impact of HIV/AIDS on women, including sex education and reproductive health education, access to condoms, access to testing and strategies to strengthen women’s economic empowerment, were necessary to lessen vulnerability within the household. Governments had a major responsibility to reflect those strategies in policy mechanisms.

PANEL II

Ms. Carolyn Hannan explained that significant progress had been made in the areas of establishing gender equality policies and strategies, establishing specialist resources and organizing of capacity-building programmes. However, a large gap between policy commitment and actual implementation continued to exist owing to the inefficient integration of gender analysis as the basis for formulating policies, strategies and programmes. Challenges also remained in the areas of developing capacity to identify and address gender perspectives, securing and capitalizing on resources, and reporting and accountability mechanisms.

Importantly, gender mainstreaming should not be regarded as merely an increased participation of women. On the contrary, gender mainstreaming reflected concerns and needs of both women and men. There were a number of innovative approaches that had been devised to support gender mainstreaming, such as the incorporation of gender perspectives into budgetary processes, mandatory gender analysis in all policy areas and gender audits. As a way of enhancing the long-term impact, the effective use of training as a process aiming at attitudinal changes rather than simply technical capacity development was suggested. There was a critical need for the development and wide dissemination of user-friendly gender mainstreaming tools and methodologies. Finally, Ms. Hannan emphasized the critical and catalytic role of the national machineries for gender equality and advancement of women in supporting and monitoring initiatives to promote gender equality.

Ms. Savitri Goonesekere underscored the indivisibility and interdependence of civil and political rights and social and economic rights. Gender equality could only be realized when both sets of rights were realized, and ensuring the connectivity between the two sets of rights was important. For example, trafficking in women and girls could not be adequately addressed simply as a matter of criminal activity. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been ratified by the majority of ESCAP member countries, had enshrined the indivisibility and interdependence of the two sets of rights. The Convention reinforced and linked the Beijing Platform for Action with women’s human rights and currently provided the legal basis for fulfilling State commitments on gender equality. She examined the way in which the Convention and the work of the monitoring Committee established under the Convention provided for both accountability and opportunities for State and non-State actors, men and women and civil society organizations to advance the agenda on gender equality. A rights-based approach must be integrated without delay into the Beijing Platform for Action, so as to introduce a women’s human rights perspective into gender and development initiatives.

Such a rights-based approach recognized women as rights holders with the strength and capacity to make a social and economic contribution, on a basis of equality with all other women and men. A rights-based approach should be incorporated in working towards both the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action in analysis and programming on issues such as poverty, women's access to land and other productive resources, education and health. It was also critical to adopt that approach in responding to violence against women perpetrated in the family and community and in situations of armed conflict.

Ms. Shireen Lateef illustrated why working in partnership was important in promoting gender equality. In particular, she focused on the value of regional cooperation. Regional cooperation provided a vital opportunity for all stakeholders to share knowledge, expertise, tools, strategies and good practices for a greater impact at all levels, across the region, between subregions, within a subregion, and between countries, and involving all actors, Governments, civil society organizations, international organizations, development partners, academic institutions, women and men. Partnerships and cooperation avoided duplication of efforts, helped to replicate good practices and contributed towards mutual and collective solutions. Partnerships provided an effective tool when addressing common needs and shared problems such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking, violence against women, migration and globalization, and encouraged and supported policy collaboration and strategy development, and helped to identify and develop common solutions.

Ms. Patricia Licuanan also addressed the value and effectiveness of partnerships, with an emphasis on civil society, as a strategy for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and more specifically for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Pointing to the explicit commitment to partnerships in key documents and to the various reasons for partnering, she cited a range of partnership examples including governmental organization and non-governmental organization partnerships as well as partnerships along thematic lines of critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. Special focus was given to partnerships in the Beijing process from the preparations at the country, regional and global levels, at the Conference itself and in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Some problems of partnership were discussed, such as unequal partnerships, ideological clashes, style conflicts, leadership issues and sustainability. Also discussed were the challenges that partnerships faced: to confront gaps and emerging issues, to re-invent governmental organization and non-governmental organization partnerships and to revitalize the women's movement through more creative partnerships with other social movements and with the younger generation.

Mr. Michael Flood explained how men had an important role to play in promoting gender equality because they were at once part of the problem and part of the solution, and were shaped by gender stereotypes and gender relations in the same way that women were. It was crucial that engaging men in initiatives to promote gender equality should not take place at the expense of gender equality work with women and girls and did not take away resources from programmes aimed at improving the lives of women and girls. The reconstruction of gender relations and achieving gender equality would involve a very strong partnership between women and men, because gender relations had impacts on the lives of women and men.

Annex II
Explanation of position by the United States of America

- The United States is pleased that ESCAP member States were able to work together to prepare this Meeting's outcome document and Bangkok Communiqué. We are joining consensus on the documents, and wish to give our explanation of position.
- The United States is firmly committed to the empowerment of women and the need to promote women's fullest enjoyment of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. We would like to emphasize the essential need to ensure that all women, as well as men, are provided with the education necessary to realize their full potential.
- The United States wishes to note in joining consensus that it is essential to recognize the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for adolescents to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the adolescent, appropriate direction and guidance on sexual and reproductive matters, education and other aspects of children's lives for which parents have the primary responsibility.
- The United States strongly supports a balanced approach to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, such as the ABC Model: Abstinence, Be Faithful, and correctly and consistently use Condoms when appropriate. The ABC approach can target and balance A, B, and C interventions according to the needs of different at-risk populations and the specific circumstances of a particular country confronting the epidemic.
- The United States fully supports the principle of voluntary choice in family planning. We have stated clearly and on many occasions, consistent with the International Conference on Population and Development, that we do not recognize abortion as a method of family planning. The United States does not promote abortion. We understand that the terms "reproductive rights" and "reproductive health services" do not constitute support, endorsement or promotion of abortion or the use of abortifacients. The United States supports the treatment of women who suffer injuries or illnesses caused by legal or illegal abortion, including for example post-abortion care, and does not place such treatment among abortion-related services.
- The United States understands that joining consensus in no way constitutes a reaffirmation of language in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly or documents references therein that could be used to suggest the creation of new human rights.
- We also understand that the documents are not intended to and do not create legally binding obligations on States under international law, nor do they indicate a change in the United States' position regarding treaties we have not ratified.
- The United States does not support quotas. The position of the United States is that the best way to guarantee women's involvement in the political process is through legal and policy reforms that end discrimination against women and promote equality of opportunity. A disadvantage of quotas is that among some they promote a perception that a woman gained a decision-making position solely because of gender and regardless of merit.

Annex III

Explanation of position by France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and New Zealand, and Observer States Canada and Sweden

I take the floor on behalf of France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and New Zealand.

Almost 10 years ago, countries around the world, including all countries in the ESCAP region, negotiated and signed the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. We appreciate that, at this week's ESCAP High-level Meeting, countries took the opportunity to reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action and showed strong support for other global commitments, particularly the Millennium Declaration, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The review in New York next year can take from this Meeting the following:

- An absolute reaffirmation of Beijing;
- A commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action;
- A renewed resolve to achieve gender equality and the human rights of women.

We were pleased to observe a general consensus that the time had come to transfer words into actions.

We recognize the rights of any person, woman or man, to have control over her or his own life, body and sexuality.

More substantial progress is needed in the following areas:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights, including information for youth and adolescents;
- The negative impact of HIV and AIDS on women, especially poor and marginalized groups;
- Recognition of women's role in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building.

We look forward to further concrete progress in New York next year.