

## POSTSCRIPT

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### BPFA at Risk

In the last ten years, the BPFA has provided women with a minimum political platform for asserting and expanding their rights. Women's movements, nevertheless, know that the battle to realize the commitments have been an uphill climb from the outset. In 2000, women's movements saw a very thorny negotiation of the 5-year review of the BPFA when some governments began questioning their prior commitments. In March 2005, the international community will convene in New York to commemorate the 10 years of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). For sure the women's movements will be there as well, some coming from the sub-region of Southeast Asia on which this volume is focused.

There are big reasons for the women's movements to be anxious about with this forthcoming meeting. Overall, states have become exclusively preoccupied with the issues of national growth and security such that citizen's rights, including women's rights, and democracy have become mere appendages and footnotes in formal agreements. Moreover, the prevalent state discourse on development has become more narrowly focused on a minimum agenda of the Millennium Development Goals in which women's rights is threatened with further invisibility. Furthermore, women's rights are under direct attack by states that are controlled by conservative political forces which moralize and essentialize the unequal relations of the sexes. The heightened insecurity and confusion has created a fertile ground for intolerance and increased the propensity of states for social control everywhere.

This extremely complex and threatening environment calls for supporting women's leadership and power as a challenge and alternative to male-led political constructions of the state and processes of governance. But the immediate challenge lies in the ability of women's movements to recast how women's access to public power and leadership is understood and pursued. Integral to this is the repositioning of the strategy of women in politics within women's movements that are active, dynamic and radical and which are politically interlinked with other movements and progressive forces. The promotion of women's political rights and empowerment must also be interlinked more firmly and consistently with the struggle for people's rights and justice. At all levels, the defense of the BPFA must be made together with the defense of other commitments to human rights, justice and freedom. Only then do women stand a chance at confronting systematic backlash reaction to women's rights coming from states and other political, economic and socio-cultural forces. Only then can the BPFA vision of the women's equal access to power and decision-making make a difference for gender equality, democracy and overall transformation.

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## BPFA Reaffirmed

### After the Meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Commission on the Status of Women which was established in 1946 was mandated to observe and evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Platform For Action (BPFA).

Between February 28th and March 11th, 2005, the international community convened in New York at the 49th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to commemorate the 10 years of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and to evaluate its implementation. As in previous major meetings, the women's movements were there as well, some coming from the sub-region of Southeast Asia on which this publication is focused. This NGO community organized a wide range of side events besides the official UN meeting.

Many participants were disappointed about the US blocking the meeting for a week with the attempt to open the BPFA and change some formulations in order to make clear that no additional human rights had been recognized in Beijing. In particular, the US participants wanted to emphasize that the right to abortion is not included in women's right to reproductive health. Finally, however, the BPFA could be reaffirmed, although most participants were discontented with the mere reaffirmation instead of developing substantial strategies for implementation.<sup>1</sup>

While some NGO representatives assume that the smaller scale of the 2005 session of the CSW compared to the Beijing+5 session in 2000 showed the decreasing significance of women's and gender policies<sup>2</sup>, UN reports stress the continuing importance of and interest in the BPFA that are demonstrated by the participation of 1,800 government delegates from 165 member states (compared to only 43 represented member states in 2000).<sup>3</sup> The role of the UN as the most important public platform for women's struggle for equality, development and peace was acknowledged by all participants.<sup>4</sup>

Several advances regarding the status of women have been reported, mainly in the fields of women's rights, girl's education and women's political participation. However, important challenges were also identified. The most striking ones are female poverty, violence against women, reproductive health rights as well as increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS among women.<sup>5</sup>

At the end, not all of the ten proposed resolutions could be passed. On some of the resolutions, no consensus could be achieved and these resolutions had to be put on a roll-call vote what

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<sup>1</sup>Tripon, Olivia H., International Women's Day at the U.N., 2005, [http://www.wfspathil.com/watsnew/intl\\_unreviewappraisal\\_beijing10\\_features.htm#womensday](http://www.wfspathil.com/watsnew/intl_unreviewappraisal_beijing10_features.htm#womensday)

<sup>2</sup>Wichterich, Christa, Under attack from the neo-conservatives, D+C Vol. 32.2005:4, p. 172. Commission on the Status of Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/e200027.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>UN, Press Release: Beijing at ten, New York, March 11, 2005, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/documents/press-releases/Beijing%20closing%20Eng-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Tripon, Olivia H., International Women's Day at the U.N., 2005, [http://www.wfspathil.com/watsnew/intl\\_unreviewappraisal\\_beijing10\\_features.htm#womensday](http://www.wfspathil.com/watsnew/intl_unreviewappraisal_beijing10_features.htm#womensday)

<sup>5</sup>Wichterich, Christa, Under attack from the neo-conservatives, D+C Vol. 32.2005:4, p. 172. UN, Press Release: Beijing at ten, New York, March 11, 2005, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/documents/press-releases/Beijing%20closing%20Eng-FINAL.pdf>

resulted to a lack of time to decide on the remaining resolutions. However, six new resolutions were finally adopted: on gender mainstreaming on national policies and programs; on the viability of appointing a special rapporteur on discrimination against women; on reducing demand for trafficking; on integrating a gender perspective in post-disaster relief especially in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami; on indigenous women; and on women's economic advancement. Additionally, resolutions that were carried over from previous sessions of the CSW could also be adopted: women, the girl-child and HIV/AIDS; the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women; the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan; and the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women.<sup>6</sup>

Other important topics that were taken up ranged from the situation of disabled women, women in (armed) conflicts including sexual violence as a method of warfare, other forms of violence against women, reproductive health rights and access to health services, support for "diverse forms of families and relationships", the influence of mainstream media on gender relations, economic discrimination of women, as well as gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies. Some participants expressed their disappointment about the absence of a strong focus on human rights.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of the involvement of boys and men as agents of gender equality was stressed on the March 9th panel discussion on youth perspective on promotion of gender equality. Boys indeed learn gender in a very early age and maintain patterns of behavior during adulthood. It is necessary to make clear that traditional forms of men's lives should no longer be sustained because they do not only discriminate girls and women but also limit boys' and men's opportunities, as Michael Flood, post-doctoral fellow at LaTrobe University's Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, pointed out.<sup>8</sup>

Criticism was raised referring to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are perceived as making women invisible. There were voices pointing out that where gender will be mainstreamed it will be "nowhere" and that the term "gender" is prone to neglect realities like masculinity, femininity and patriarchy. While gender mainstreaming is the ultimate goal, special programs that focus on women are still needed.<sup>9</sup>

During the panel discussion on gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies on March 10th, Danny Leipziger, Vice-President for Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) and Head of the PREM Network, World Bank, stated that "[t]he reduction of gender inequality was a development goal in its own right. There was now growing recognition among economists of the adverse effects of gender inequality on economic growth and on the prospects for poverty reduction." In the same discussion, Indonesia's successful efforts towards building national capacity have been recognized. Besides their ratification of CEDAW and all core conventions

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<sup>6</sup>Familara, Aileen, 49TH CSW PASSES TEN RESOLUTIONS BUT FAILS TO CONCLUDE MEETING <http://apww.isiswomen.org/pages/activities/uncsw/onsite-march11.html>  
CSW, Press Release WOM/1504, COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN ADOPTS 10 WIDE-RANGING RESOLUTIONS, BUT FAILS TO CONCLUDE CURRENT SESSION, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/wom1504.doc.htm>

<sup>7</sup>CSW, Press Release WOM/1502, Youth Perspectives on Promotion of Gender Equality, Focus of women's commission panel, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/wom1502.doc.htm>

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Tripon, Olivia H., International Women's Day at the U.N., 2005, [http://www.wfphil.com/watsnew/intl\\_unreviewappraisal\\_beijing10\\_features.htm#womensday](http://www.wfphil.com/watsnew/intl_unreviewappraisal_beijing10_features.htm#womensday);  
Familara, Aileen, feminists call for change in culture of Patriarchy, APWW, 2005 <http://apww.isiswomen.org/pages/activities/uncsw/onsite-side-event.html>

of the ILO, Indonesia managed to include gender mainstreaming in their development policies and macroeconomics. In spite of that, poor working conditions in Indonesia were criticized. In Cambodia, as it was stated, gender budgeting was started at the women's ministry but has not yet become part of the work of other ministries.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning political participation of women, the appraisal of the responses to a questionnaire and other information provided by Member States showed that almost all governments took measures to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making. And most of them could indeed report such an increase. Two of the reporting countries – Rwanda and Sweden – are already close to gender parity in their parliaments while further 11 countries (Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands and Norway) reached the targeted 30 per cent women's representation in parliaments. In general, however, it had to be concluded that progress continues to be "slow and uneven". Many countries acknowledged a correlation between electoral systems and women's participation in national parliaments, whereby proportional systems seem to be more conducive to women's representation than majoritarian systems. In general, decentralization opens political spaces for women. But since women's participation in local politics challenges stereotypes and prejudices, women will still need support to enter this field. Some countries identified several obstacles to women's political participation, e.g. the lack of access to education, training and productive resources as well as patriarchal cultures and stereotypes that are often supported and maintained by mass media.<sup>11</sup> Some voices, like that of Jessica Neuwirth, president of Equality Now, also pointed out that even in UN structures representation of women is not yet sufficiently given and gender mainstreaming has not completely become reality yet.<sup>12</sup> Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, even underlined this standpoint with statistics: only 37.1% of all staff of the UN system are women (professional and higher categories with appointments of one year or more) which marks an increase of only 1.6% since 1998. On high levels, increase was higher but representation of women remained even lower, e.g. at the Under-Secretary-General level women's representation increased by 6.5% but stands at only 17.5%. However, gender balance could already be achieved within three UN organizations: the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Although there have been identified some important achievements of the last ten years of struggle for gender equality – including women's participation in politics and decision-making – none of the problems addressed since 1995 could be fully solved yet and even new challenges arose during the last years, mainly connected to globalization and HIV/AIDS. There is still a long way to go on the thorny path to gender equality. And this goal must not be neglected or subordinated because – as stated by the secretary-general of the UN Kofi Annan – "[S]tudy after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women".

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<sup>10</sup>CSW, Press Release WOM/1503, Gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies, regional gender-equality promotion subjects of women's commission panel discussions, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/wom1503.doc.htm>

<sup>11</sup>United Nations, Economic and Social Council, 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", pp.62-66, <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/sgrepBPFA.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>Familara, Aileen, Two-Part Celebration of International Women's Day <http://apwww.isiswomen.org/pages/activities/uncsw/onsite-march8.html>