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to the special session of the General Assembly entitled**

**“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

In the Asia Pacific region, nearly twenty years after the Beijing Platform was adopted, social, political, and economic inequality and the crippling effects of poverty continue to define the lives of millions of women, precluding their enjoyment of a broad range of interdependent rights. Approximately 2.5 billion women in the Asia Pacific are currently living on less than 10 United States dollars per day, including 600 million who live on less than 1.25 dollars per day.

Governments in the region have made numerous international commitments in recent decades to upholding women's rights. In addition to the Beijing Platform for Action, all but three governments have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. And yet, the gap between the promises made by governments and the reality of women's lives in the region remains immense.

In this submission, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development wishes to highlight the critical need for accountability of governments and other relevant actors if the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform is to be achieved. This need for accountability is especially critical when governments are responding to an imperative that is more powerful than their international commitments; namely, the imperative of neo-liberal, market-driven development. We ask that they pursue a more just and equitable form of development. We ask for Development Justice.

We welcome the intention to focus the 20-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action on implementation and accountability, given the limited outcomes that have resulted from a monitoring process alone. Aside from the core elements of concrete benchmarks and timetables for reporting, evaluation, and remedy associated with a strong accountability framework, accountability must also encompass the commitment of governments to creating an enabling environment and providing the means of implementation for women's rights and gender equality.

Partnership with civil society

A strong partnership with civil society is fundamental for ensuring accountability at all levels: local, national, regional, and international. Governments and UN agencies have recognized the importance of civil society participation and public engagement in its deliberation of the post-2015 development agenda, especially after the exclusion of civil society in the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is therefore imperative that the women's movement and feminist organisations are guaranteed participation in the work of decision-making bodies at all levels, and that broader efforts are made to strengthen participatory democracy for women. This includes everything from fostering open public debate around the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the post-2015 development agenda, to including civil society in national delegations to intergovernmental processes, to ensuring the participation of civil society in the collection of data used in the Beijing review process.

These steps are especially urgent given the increasing pressure civil society is under in its attempts to hold governments accountable. Compared to the decade in which the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, the space for civil society to advocate on behalf of women is continuing to shrink. As mandated by the Beijing

Platform for Action, governments must work direct with civil society in their national reviews and more generally in the implementation of the Platform.

Accountability of governments and other actors

Genuine accountability in relation to each of the Critical Areas in the Beijing Platform for Action requires accountability not only of governments, but all actors who perpetrate human rights violations. This includes transnational corporations, international financial institutions, security forces, and foreign governments who are in breach of their extra-territorial obligations.

With respect to national governments, their commitments to uphold women's human rights must be honoured through the legislature and reviewed by national parliaments and regularly reported to parliaments and constituents.

Enabling environment and means of implementation

Governments' commitments to women's rights will amount to little more than rhetoric as long as there is no broader commitment to an enabling environment for those rights. At the root of much of the inequality experienced by women in Asia and the Pacific is a fundamentally inequitable model of development that privileges growth over equity and human rights. When combined with longstanding and entrenched social and cultural norms that discriminate against women, this growth-oriented model has had a devastating impact on women in the region. Indeed, the Expert Group report for the 58th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women concluded that "the prevailing neo-liberal economic model is incapable of supporting gender-equitable sustainable development".

We therefore reiterate the importance of transforming the macro-economic environment so that governments are encouraged and enabled to fulfil their human rights commitments, including through the provision of financial resources necessary to implement their commitments. This not only encompasses a renewed commitment to Official Development Assistance, but also to international trade, finance, and investment arrangements that support and complement national efforts to develop sustainably and equitably. It also requires supporting public financing of public goods over private-sector-oriented partnerships, given the clearly detrimental impact privatisation of government utilities has had on women in Asia and the Pacific, and the lack of binding human rights standards on private actors. In this regard, our efforts in relation to the Beijing Platform for Action should be linked to the discussion of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, which faces the same challenges in ensuring the fulfilment of women's human rights.

Ultimately, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and its hundreds of members and partners are ready and willing to work with governments to realise the collective, ambitious vision articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action. After two decades of deeply uneven progress in realising women's human rights, we ask that the focus in this review process centre on genuine accountability. Finally, we ask that the objective of governments in this process and in the post-2015 process be to ultimately deliver a new vision of development that is based on human rights, equity, and fulfils the need for economic, social, environmental, redistributive, and gender justice. Accountability to people must also be a key element. This model of development — Development Justice — has been endorsed by hundreds of civil society organisations and social movements from around the world. We call on governments to recognise the crossroads that women, and humankind as a whole, currently face, and to choose the path of Development Justice.