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and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled

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

Statement submitted by Women’s Intercultural Network, 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

Women's Intercultural Network's mission is to ensure that all women and girls have a voice in their government and economy. It is also critical that their voices be heard during the 20 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that was adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995.

The Beijing Declaration was an important historical milestone for all women globally bringing attention to women's concerns and recognizing women as equal partners in policy development. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirmed that women's rights are human rights and that women need to enjoy equal rights and opportunities with men in order to create sustainable and just societies. The Declaration specified several objectives to implement the twelve critical concerns on a national and global level. The objectives addressed included the development of gender-based methodologies and revision of laws and administrative practices. While on the international scale, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action had a significant impact on government policies, laws, thus propelling women's rights forward; the United States peripherally acknowledged the document. After twenty years have passed since the Beijing conference, it remains a challenge for many United States based non-governmental organizations and non-profit service organizations to make effective use of the human rights lens in benefiting women and girls' concerns on the local as well national level.

In order to develop gender responsive strategies, gender based-research, practice and guiding principles need to be incorporated into governmental operations. Since 1995, when Women's Intercultural Network adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as a framework for grassroots organizing in California, we have witnessed a significant win for women in San Francisco, California. It was the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a city-wide ordinance in 1998 as a strategy that brought women closer to equality by requiring gender analysis of government departments and creating the Gender Equality Principles initiative. These tools adopted the human rights lens, helping to prevent discrimination and integrate gender considerations into daily operations within the city departments but also in the private sector (Department on the Status of Women, Human Rights in Action).

The use of gender equality framework for policy reforms supported the creation of the Family Friendly Workplace Ordinance in 2013, giving parents legal ground to negotiate a flexible work schedule, and Gender Equality Principles encouraged companies to eliminate gender discrimination in the workforce by using the self-assessment tool for gender-equal workplace practices and policies. The ordinance further gave precedence for expanding services for women sexually assaulted, victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. These are examples of how local gender and culturally sensitive ordinances can have an impact on the lives of women and girls.

Regardless of these positive local reforms, women still fare behind men in equal opportunities. Women are predominantly vulnerable to unemployment and often do not share equal benefits with men in the recovering economy. While the poverty rate in the United States declined in 2013, women remained at 14.5 per cent compared to 11.0 per cent of men living in poverty according to National Women's Law Center. Among the most affected by poverty are single mothers and minorities due to state

budget cuts and weakened family support programs as reported by California Budget Project, 2012. General funds were cut by 16.6 per cent between 2007 and 2012 mostly affecting California state spending on education, social services that aid needy families, and reduced financial help for disabled and poor seniors. These cuts have not been reinstated and continually less funds go to social programs.

The lack of gender-sensitive policy and administrative practices impair women's recognition in all areas of their lives. Gender bias, discrimination, inflexible policies and stereotyping still hold women back in improving their socioeconomic status. According to research done by Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California 2014, occupational segregation still continues. Statistics show that women are the most represented in nursing and healthcare technology careers (69 per cent women vs. 31 per cent men) in California. Women occupy the lower-paying position in this sector. Further, women are overrepresented in personal care and service occupations — some of the lowest paid industries.

Although the San Francisco municipality has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ordinance, the United States at large has lagged on ratification; on securing constitutional protection under an Equal Rights Amendment, on equal pay, on representation in decision-making, on addressing disparate male/female poverty rates, and on devising supportive policies for working parents. Congress is now composed of 17 per cent women where it has remained for over five years as our best-ever number, and the United States is ranked seventy-first in the world in terms of women at the top levels of government (The World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report). In 1995, it ranked forty-second. While Norway, France, the Netherlands, and Spain boast a 30 to 40 per cent participation of women on all corporate boards, McKinsey reports that three quarters of Fortune 1500 companies do not have a single woman on their board. There is still a long way to go to empower women and ensure gender equality standards are being met.

Recommendations

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, stakeholders have met on several occasions at the regional and global levels, in 1999/2000 (Beijing+5), in 2004/2005 (Beijing+10) and in 2010 (Beijing+15) to review progress made in the achievement of gender equality, development and peace. The Beijing+20 review will take place in 2014 in advance of the 59th annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

In June 2000, the General Assembly also adopted a political declaration, reaffirming Member States' commitment to the objectives set forth in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Prior review of the progress Member States made regarding the twelve critical areas of concern remained slow in certain areas, namely in the areas of Millennium Development Goal three, concerning gender equality and empowerment and goal five, concerning maternal health. Progress against violence against women was also an area of concern, as 1 in three women are beaten, assaulted or raped in their lifetimes. The Beijing Declaration states, "Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern to all States and should be addressed ..."

It is recommended that all governments participate by forming national plans of action to implement the Beijing Declaration locally and continue to monitor these action plans by holding regional and local governments accountable. The National Plans of Action for each country must outline specific activities that the national governments will undertake to improve the situation of women, including addressing violence against women and gender equality.

Women's organizations have stressed the need to link the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, in addition to the importance of coordination and cooperation between women's non-governmental organizations.

Though there is still a long way to go, since 1995, governments in the Middle East, African nations and Asian nations have opened up avenues for basic education for girls. Within the first five years after Beijing, constitutional amendments were also enacted, ensuring equal protection under the law in many Latin American countries. Numerous member nations, pressed by non-governmental organizations, used the Beijing Declaration to press for the passage of laws on violence against women, including trafficking, genital mutilation, child brides, and "honour crimes".

Governments on every continent have established legal, constitutional, or party changes to improve the representation of women in public policymaking. Major trends continue to be regarded in terms of education, the role of women in peace and security matters, participation in decision-making and governance and an increased action to end violence against women by, in part, promoting and strengthening legal rights.

It will require joint accountability between policymaking bodies and non-governmental and civil society organizations to assist in the continued development and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly regarding the 12 critical areas of concern with a focus on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is ideal to observe and account for the developments made since 1995 and the areas where progress is still lagging.
