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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”**

Statement submitted by Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, 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.



Statement

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, which led to the far-reaching Beijing Platform for Action, was considered by many to be the springboard for States to take a unified approach in addressing women's inequality at the global level. The outcome document, which the women's movement was part of shaping and developing, was a blueprint for all actors identified: Governments, the women's movement and wider civil society.

Twenty years on from its adoption, not only have the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action not been achieved, but also women have experienced a further dilution by States of their fundamental rights and of the key actions needed to address the barriers and challenges still faced by women.

Since 1995, States have given an account of their progress through reports and verbal commitments to the Commission on the Status of Women during its five-year reviews, but this is not enough.

The United Nations is becoming a cold house for women. What had started with promise has now, 20 years later, become a box-ticking process. Many States do not take responsibility for the implementation of actions arising from the Beijing Platform for Action. Worse, many have eradicated fundamental rights for women. This has happened without sanction.

Women in Northern Ireland can list many United Nations conventions and treaties, as well as the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action, that have not been implemented by Governments. In addition, women have been absent from the table at peace negotiations. Despite the commitment made in the Good Friday Agreement to the full and equal participation of women, no specific steps for women's involvement have been taken and women remain underrepresented in all spheres.

While women understand that the main role of the United Nations is to maintain world peace, it is important to recognize that many global concerns, such as war, recession, outbreaks of disease, famine, child abuse, trafficking and illicit drugs, have a major impact on women.

Holding a session of the Commission every five years on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is meaningless unless the United Nations also puts women's rights and equality at the top of its priorities and considers and implements ways to ensure that States address those issues through concentrated, coherent and collective action.

Key questions that the United Nations should consider

The following are key questions that the United Nations should consider:

How can the United Nations and its bodies be more effective in holding States accountable?

What sanctions should the United Nations employ to ensure that the actions of States in meeting the requirements of other conventions and treaties meet the objectives and standards of the Beijing Platform for Action?

How can the United Nations ensure a continued focus on the powerful message of the Beijing Platform for Action?

Recommendations

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform has considered the above questions and recommends:

- (a) That the Commission consider a negotiation event with States to develop targets and timelines for the delivery of the actions contained in the Beijing Platform for Action;
- (b) That States be held accountable by submitting a midterm review report to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for dissemination and in preparation for the next review of the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;
- (c) That States demonstrate in those midterm review reports how they have engaged with civil society (women's non-governmental organizations and trade unions, among others) in their preparation;
- (d) That resources be secured to monitor a State's responses to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, along with other relevant treaty bodies, and that this be linked with the five-year review of the State by the Commission;
- (e) That the Commission adopt a carrot-and-stick approach, holding a name-and-shame session and highlighting models of good practice on the global stage.
