



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 November 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**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 Forum for Women 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.



Statement

The world that women want: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years on and beyond

The Forum for Women and Development, which has had 66 member organizations in Norway and partner organizations in more than 35 countries in the global South over the past 20 years, welcomes the holding of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the possibility given to assess what has been achieved, review where we are today and discuss and agree on what is needed for the coming years to achieve full gender equality.

Twenty years ago, more than 30,000 representatives from civil society joined forces with leaders and representatives of States Members of the United Nations to forge what was to become the Beijing Platform for Action. The 12 critical areas of concern then identified have remained important and some remain just as critical today as they were 20 years ago. As we approach 2015, we see that some of our rights are under attack and that during discussions on gender equality and women's empowerment in the United Nations, we too often have to fight to preserve past achievements (by which we mean language from the Beijing Platform for Action) in conclusions and outcome documents, when what we should be doing is creating new policies for the future.

In the review of the Beijing Platform for Action and the discussions during the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we once again need representatives of Member States who can be visionary and chart a course for the future that will contribute to the sustainable development goals to be agreed upon later in the year by the General Assembly.

Far too many women and girls are still fighting for the most fundamental of human rights: safety, health, education and economic rights. If Member States continue to be satisfied with the status quo, they will send a wrong signal on what needs to be included in the sustainable development goals to create the right conditions for the future that women need.

During this critical period in the run-up to the end of the Millennium Development Goals timeline, the human rights of women have never been more important. We must continue to drive towards a better world for women and girls and ensure that a strong message is carried forward into the next chapter of gender equality, women's empowerment and development.

The Forum for Women and Development wants to use the present statement to give special attention to three thematic issues.

In July 2015, the third International Conference on Financing for Development will take place in Addis Ababa. Discussions at the Conference will determine the will to implement the forthcoming sustainable development goals. We need to focus on how the sustainable development goals will be implemented. What is critical is that the ambition of the gender equality goal and, more broadly, of the sustainable development goals be matched by equally ambitious means of implementation, in particular ambitious financing.

At the third International Conference on Financing for Development, it will be important to show will and to take action to invest in the stand-alone gender

equality goal itself and, as importantly, in the gender dimensions of other critical issues included in the sustainable development goals. This investment is critical if we are to achieve gender equality and implement women's rights. Funding needs for poverty eradication and sustainable development, as well as for gender equality, remain significant.

According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development showed that, while funding for gender equality increased between 2002 and 2012, it has remained very low in some sectors, such as the role of women in peace and security, women's leadership and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Funding for economic empowerment has stalled since 2007. This has to change.

According to a recent report of the World Bank entitled *Women, Business and the Law 2014*, almost 90 of the 143 economies covered by the report have at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities. Many laws still make it difficult for women to participate fully in economic life, whether by getting jobs or starting businesses. Discriminatory rules bar women from certain jobs, restrict access to capital for women-owned firms and limit women's capacity to make legal decisions. Gender differences in laws affect both developing and developed economies, and women in all regions. We need to create policies to support and legally guarantee the rights of women to have control over land, property and productive resources.

We need to create an enabling environment for women's economic participation. This means that we need to have much more inclusive macroeconomic policies and macroeconomic decision-making. Unfortunately, macroeconomic policies remain largely blind to gender issues and women remain severely underrepresented in economic policymaking. We need to foster policies that protect women's right to decent work, including equitable pay and benefits, safe working conditions and the right to organize.

If we are to reach the goal set by the World Bank to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, Governments, donors and a number of other actors need to change their thinking and actions drastically. Where we lag behind in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and of development in general is in investing in gender equality. With all the attention that the United Nations and others are now placing on education, we have to start to think seriously about what we want to offer to all the girls to whom we now want to provide an education. When they finish school and vocational training, they will need jobs. Development today is provided by too many donors in silos and on certain thematic issues, and not with the needed holistic approach.

An issue that has become increasingly important over the past 20 years, since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, is climate change and the urgent need to act to save the planet. In 2015, the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be held in Paris. The objective of the Conference is to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate for all the nations of the world.

The gendered nature of climate change was officially recognized during the international climate negotiations in 2012, in Doha. The decision calls for greater gender parity in the negotiations and gender-sensitive climate policies.

The link between gender and climate change remains unclear to many. Research shows that, owing to gender-assigned roles, women and men contribute differently to climate change and the impacts of climate change are unevenly felt.

In many respects, women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men, primarily because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. They also face social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity. Women too often do not have a place at the table when the effects of climate change are discussed and when resources, information and financial measures and possibilities are discussed, developed and distributed.

It is important to remember that women are not only vulnerable to climate change but also effective actors or agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Women often have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies.

With the review of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Commission on the Status of Women, strong messages and specific language have to be sent forward to contribute to the post-2015 process and the sustainable development goals in order to clearly include gender in climate change and environmental goals and targets. In addition, the same message has to be sent to Member States heading for the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, in November 2015.

Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and the right to decide over their own bodies are under attack, and language on this issue is constantly questioned, watered down or totally removed. Sexual and reproductive health and rights need to be at the core of the sustainable development goals. Developing countries have a large number of young people who need access to education and health services, as well as good governance.

We need autonomy over our bodies, whom we love and how we love, and the capacity to decide whom we marry. Early and forced marriage is still an enormous problem.

We call on the Commission on the Status of Women to show leadership that will provide women with the future that they want and need.