



Roundup



United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
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Beijing + 10: 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

INTRODUCTION

More than 1,800 delegates from 165 Member States, 80 ministers, seven first ladies, representatives from every UN agency and 2,720 NGOs from all parts of the world gathered at UN headquarters in New York from 28 February-11 March 2005 for the 49th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The 49th Session marked the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. This special anniversary was celebrated with an unparalleled presence of NGOs and women's organization from around the world.

The session considered two main themes:

- (i) Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including the outcome of the General Assembly Special Session for Beijing+5—Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century, and
- (ii) Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls.

Throughout the proceedings, governments pledged to accelerate efforts to achieve equality for women and fulfil Beijing commitments with a Declaration. To complete the decisions of the session and to adopt its report, CSW also held a resumed session on 22 March 2005.

BACKGROUND

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), adopted in 1995, aims to remove all obstacles to women's active participation in public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision making, which means, in principle, shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. The BPA also integrates gender perspectives in poverty, macroeconomics, education, health, war zones, human rights and media representation. In addition to the BPA, the Beijing Declaration and the outcome document of Beijing+5 established gender-based linkages with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In preparation for the Beijing+10 Review by CSW, a number of

expert group meetings were held on various gender-related issues. The expert group meeting in Rome (29 November-2 December 2004) focused on the role of national mechanisms to promote gender equality and empowerment of women with participating governments elaborating their national attempts to promote the advancement of women. Another expert group meeting in Baku (Azerbaijan) held from 7-10 February 2005, dealt with achievements, gaps and challenges in linking the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. The most recent expert group meeting, held in Geneva (11-14 April 2005), focused on violence against women and the related data collection methodologies. Although significant advancements have been made in addressing violence against women, this meeting elaborated on the necessity of establishing a national legal framework protecting the rights of women.

The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), as the Secretariat of the CSW, has drawn on a variety of sources of information and statistics to facilitate the process and to compile inputs of government delegations. National implementation plans were submitted to the CSW in 1998 and 1999 and national reports were also submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As a complementary tool, at the end of 2003, CEDAW sent a questionnaire about the obstacles to, and major achievements toward, the implementation of the BPA to States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The outcome of the questionnaire was submitted to the CSW at its 49th Session along with national implementation plans.

PLENARY, HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLES AND PANELS

On 28 February, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed the opening segment, as well as the Presidents of the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Statements were also made by representatives of the Member States that had hosted the four previous world conferences on women: Mexico (1975), Denmark (1980), Kenya (1985) and China (1995). These were followed by statements by the Under-Secretary-General for the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), José Antonio Ocampo; the Assistant Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,

Rachel Mayanja; the Directors of DAW, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Centre for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); and the Chairs of the Human Rights Commission and CEDAW.

During the debate that followed, Member States identified best practices, shared experiences, and made recommendations for promoting gender equality ranging from appointing high-level commissioners on gender issues to establishing inter-departmental taskforces, to organizing women's caucuses and campaigns to encourage greater participation in decision making. A series of roundtables also took place focusing on areas, such as the MDGs and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Other topics that were part of the debate included upgrading data collection and analysis and recognizing the impact of economic policies on women.

High-Level Plenary

The 49th Session of the Commission also included a three-day high-level plenary on 1, 2 and 7 March marking the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. The high-level plenary, extended for one three-hour session to accommodate the large number of speakers, heard statements by more than 60 Ministers and over 30 other high-level representatives from capitals, as well as representatives of six intergovernmental organizations, ten United Nations entities and 12 NGOs.

High-Level Roundtable

The Commission held a high-level roundtable on 28 February on "Innovations in institutional arrangements for promoting gender equality at the national level." Organized in two parallel sessions, the roundtable allowed for interaction among a large number of participants, with over 70 speakers participating in the two sessions.

The roundtable also provided an opportunity for high-level representatives from capitals to engage in an interactive dialogue and to share practical experiences, lessons learned and obstacles encountered in institutional capacity building. Participants identified new and emerging challenges for enhancing the role of institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as areas requiring increased attention from national machineries.

Interactive Panels

Seven interactive panels focusing on a range of issues relevant to the Commission's work were held. Issue papers were prepared for each panel and summaries from moderators will be included in the final official report of the Commission.

Panel I focused on "Synergies between national-level implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women." The discussion highlighted that the power of the women's human rights movement emanates from the diversity of its participants. Women are not a homogenous group and their priorities differ widely according to region, class, ethnicity, age, education, marital status, and sexual orientation, among many other categories. The women's movement, seeing these differences as a source of strength, embraced the diverse perspectives and adopted a holistic approach to social justice. Participants underscored the present need to push for implementation and enforcement of agreed

goals. It was suggested that in the face of indifference and outright hostility, every success, however modest, is a gain for inclusion and will benefit women, children and men alike.

Panel II dealt with "Addressing the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly and the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration: Progress, gaps and challenges." Participants underscored the point that gender equality and the empowerment of women are goals in themselves, as well as an important means towards the achievement of all the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, which could not be achieved without women's empowerment and gender equality. In turn, progress in reaching the internationally agreed development goals contributed to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Therefore, the integration of gender perspectives into all policies and programmes aimed at the implementation of the Goals was considered crucial.

Panel III was entitled "Presentation of the review and appraisal processes at regional level—achievements, gaps and challenges." To facilitate the regional implementation, monitoring and evaluation process, the BPA requested ECOSOC to consider reviewing the institutional capacity of the UN regional commissions within their mandates, including their women's units and focal points, to deal with gender issues in the light of the Platform for Action, as well as the regional platforms and plans of action. Within their existing mandates and activities, the regional commissions were asked to mainstream women's issues and gender perspectives and to also consider the establishment of mechanisms and processes to ensure the implementation and monitoring of both the Platform for Action and the regional platforms and plans of action.

Panel IV focused on the "Remaining challenges in relation to statistics and indicators, building on the discussions at the High-level roundtable organized in the 48th session of the Commission (2004) as well as available data from the World's Women: Trends and Statistics (2005) and the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (2005)." The objective of the panel was to build on the discussions of the high-level roundtable of the CSW on the gaps and challenges in measuring progress in the context of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the special GA session. It provided an opportunity to examine the statistical issues highlighted in the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development as well as in relation to the preparation of the publication on *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*. Expert panelists and participants shared experiences and identified good practice examples as well as priority areas for further action.

Panel V shared ideas on "Future perspectives on promotion of gender equality: Through the eyes of young women and men." Incorporating gender equality was seen as essential for successful implementation of the MDGs. Young women and men as well as youth organizations were identified as key resources in promoting gender equality. Hence adopting policies and actions to stimulate the involvement of young women and men in gender equality work could speed up the achievement of the goals of gender equality and the overall goals of the MDGs. The discussion at this panel focused on the priorities and strategies of young women and men to promote gender equality, as well as the ways and means of enhancing and supporting the engagement of young women and men. Examples of concrete initiatives by young women and men—or

by governments and other actors to support the initiatives of young women and men and good practices and lessons learned were shared and areas for future action were identified. Among other issues, the panel covered the topics of unequal power relations in sexual and reproductive health, employment, information communication technology (ICT) as an empowering tool, participation in decision making, violence against women, education for gender equality, the role of media in eliminating gender stereotypes and the importance of youth organizations for promoting gender equality.

Panel VI focused on the "Integration of gender perspectives in macroeconomics" to highlight ways and means to identify and integrate gender perspectives into macroeconomic policies and programmes, including further clarification of the linkages between macroeconomic and social issues. Panelists and participants discussed the achievements, gaps and challenges in incorporating gender perspectives into macroeconomic policies and programmes and linking economic and social development. The following issues were raised: key challenges faced in integrating gender perspectives in macroeconomic policies and programmes at national level; how best to share good practices among countries; actions at the global level to ensure gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies and programmes; challenges and constraints in ensuring a close link between economic and social development; and enhancing collaboration between ministries of trade, finance and other ministries focusing on the economy, and those focusing on social development.

This panel also looked at the particular role the Ministry of Finance and other ministries could have in initiating, developing and implementing gender-responsive budgets, the question of how civil society, in particular women's organizations, could be involved in macroeconomic policy-making processes, the role that the private sector could play including through private-public-partnership arrangements, and the role of development partners in this regard.

Panel VII dealt with "The role of regional and intergovernmental organizations in promoting gender equality." It was recognized that regional and intergovernmental organizations play an important role in implementing international commitments and in promoting gender equality both within the organizations themselves and within Member States. The discussion highlighted experiences of regional and intergovernmental organizations in implementing the Platform for Action and the outcome of the Special GA Session and addressed the achievements, gaps and challenges in efforts of regional and intergovernmental organizations to promote and support gender equality at the national level. The discussion identified a number of areas in which regional bodies and international organizations contribute to the advancement of women. These include support to gender mainstreaming efforts of Member States through macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction strategies as well as Member States ratifying and implementing the CEDAW Convention and other relevant regional legal mechanisms to protect women's rights.

Beijing +10

On 8 March, CSW commemorated 30 years of United Nations efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. The programme of the special event included statements from dignitaries, such as the Secretary-Generals of the four world conferences on women, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and the former and current Special Advisers to the

Secretary-General on Women and Gender Equality. The Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Public Information, Shashi Tharoor, moderated the event. The purpose of the panel was to look forward and to link the Beijing+10 Review with other processes going on in 2005, such as the review of progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and responses to the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

NGO Participation

The session involved an unusually high number of non-governmental participants: 2,720 NGO representatives from 595 organizations participated. NGOs not only observed the formal meetings of the Commission and the many parallel events but also organized various side events, conducted caucus meetings and briefing sessions. Daily morning briefings, supported by DAW, kept NGOs informed about the proceedings of the CSW. NGOs participated as observers as well as members of national delegations.

NGO mobilization was particularly strong around the proposed US amendments to the Declaration reaffirming the 1995 Platform for Action. The amendments put forward by the US specified that the Declaration is not supposed to confer new international rights, including the right to abortion and underlined the importance of economic empowerment for women.

NGOs welcomed the withdrawal of these contested amendments on 4 March, but regretted that time that was lost during the Commission over this issue. The Political Declaration was finally adopted by consensus at the end of the first week. Over the two weeks of the Commission, NGOs emphasized repeatedly the importance of linking the BPA with the MDGs and the need to engender the Goals consistently.

Session Outcomes

Declaration

On 4 March, the Commission adopted a Declaration reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5). The Beijing+10 Declaration emphasized that the full and effective implementation of the commitments already made is essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, such as the MDGs and stressed the need to ensure integration of a gender perspective in the high-level plenary meeting on the review of the Millennium Declaration, scheduled for 14-16 September 2005. It also recognized that the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action and CEDAW are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. The Declaration called upon the UN system and other actors to fully commit themselves and to intensify their contributions to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly.

Resolutions

The 49th Session adopted ten resolutions, five of which are traditionally tabled at the Commission. These included the resolutions on Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS; Mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes; Strengthening of 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.

There was a shift of focus in the resolution on gender mainstreaming from the UN system to the national level. The resolution notably calls for the Secretary-General's report to focus on gender mainstreaming at the national level.

Five new resolutions adopted included: advisability of the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Laws that Discriminate Against Women; eliminating demand for trafficked women and girls for all forms of exploitation; integrating a gender perspective in post-disaster relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, including in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster; indigenous women beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and economic advancement of women.

The Secretary-General was requested to submit two new reports to the 50th session of CSW on the implications of the creation of a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women and the economic advancement of women.

The decision on the review of working methods of the Commission, based on a request from the GA to all functional commissions of ECOSOC to conduct a review of their working methods, was postponed to the 50th Session of CSW in 2006.

NGO Participation

During the 49th CSW, 85 parallel events were held, including workshops, panels, caucuses, book launches, films, and videos covering the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPA. Due to the large number of requests for such events and the limited number of rooms available, all parallel events organized by NGOs (close to 200) were held in the Church Center—a building outside but near the UN complex. In addition, more than 20 parallel events took place throughout New York City during CSW.

RESUMED SESSION

Unable to complete its work within the two-week time period afforded to it, CSW held a resumed session on 22 March, at which the Commission adopted its official report of the 49th Session and its provisional agenda for the 50th Session. The

resumed session also elected the members of the Working Group on Communications, and opened the 50th Session to elect its Bureau.

Ambassador Carmen Maria Galladro (El Salvador) was elected as the Chair of the next CSW session. She is joined by four Vice-Chairs: Szilvia Szabo, Deputy Secretary of State on Youth, Social Affairs, Family Affairs and Equal Opportunity (Hungary); Thomas Woodroffe (UK); Dicky Komar (Indonesia); and Adekunbi Abibat Sonaike (Nigeria).

CONCLUSION

The 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on implementation proposals at the national level and identified achievements, gaps and challenges thereby providing an indication of areas where initiatives, within the framework of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the Special Session (Beijing+5), are critical for supplementary implementation. In total, ten resolutions and one Political Declaration were passed that reaffirmed the commitments made ten years ago in Beijing and called for increased perseverance from governments. At the passing of the declaration, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang-Chairperson of the Commission of the Status of Women said "this concise and powerful declaration is an unqualified and unconditional reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action." Ms. Mayanja stressed, "worldwide consensus has been built around the idea that empowering women is the most effective tool for development and poverty reduction."

The Declaration and the other documents are available online (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw49/documents.html).

Contact

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Resolutions adopted at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

- Women, the Girl Child and HIV/Aids
- Mainstreaming a Gender perspective into National Policies and Programmes
- Strengthening of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
- The Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan
- The Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women
- Advisability of the Appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Laws that Discriminate Against Women
- Eliminating Demand for Trafficked Women and Girls for All Forms of Exploitation
- Integrating a Gender Perspective in Post-Disaster Relief, Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Efforts, Including in the Aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster
- Indigenous Women Beyond the Ten-year Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- Economic Advancement of Women.

This edition of NGLS Roundup was prepared by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). The NGLS Roundup is produced for NGOs and others interested in the institutions, policies and activities of the UN system and is not an official record. For more information or additional copies write to: NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, fax +41-22/917 0432, e-mail <nxls@unctad.org> or NGLS, Room DC1-1106, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <nxls@un.org>. The text of this NGLS Roundup and other NGLS publications are also available online (website: www.un-nxls.org).

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