

Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women



Special one-day session of the 64th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) Photo: UN Women

On Monday, 9 March 2020, Ministers and representatives of governments of the Member States of the United Nations (UN) met at a special one-day session of the 64th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) and adopted a **Political Declaration** commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and its major seminal output, the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BD & BPfA)**, which is still considered by many gender advocates, feminists and policy-makers as ‘the visionary blue print’ for the operationalization of women’s rights. The BD & BPfA complements and is integral to the so-called ‘Women’s Bible’, the international bill of rights for women - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted on 3 September 1981 and now ratified by 189 states.

The 64th CSW was meant to be the site of celebratory, cerebral and policy deliberations by hundreds of delegates (governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), funders, research institutions, church groups, and unions) working on gender equality and women’s empowerment issues in this anniversary year of the Platform for Action. However, due to the COVID-19 virus, the event was reduced to the one-day procedural meeting with only delegations and civil society representatives based in New York. The CSW re-

viewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action 25 years after its adoption. Member States “pledged to ramp up efforts to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”.

The Beijing Platform of Action identifies 12 critical areas of concern: women in poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment and the girl child.

The *Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women*¹ called for the intensification of efforts for the full effective and accelerated implementation of the BD & BPfA in the above 12 areas of critical concern through governments taking actions: (a) Strengthening efforts to realize the right to education for all women and girls, (b) Ensuring full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making as well as equal access to leadership and representation for all women at all levels and in all spheres of society, (c) Ensuring women’s economic empowerment by enhancing women’s full access to and equal opportunities in the labour market and decent work, (d) Recognizing and taking measures to reduce and redistribute women’s and girls’ disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, (e) Strengthening social protection systems and other measures to support and empower women and girls, (f) Mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction policies (g) Eliminating, preventing and responding to all forms of violence and harmful practices against all women and girls, in the public and private spheres, (h) Strengthening the protection of women and girls in armed conflict and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all decision-making levels and at all stages of peace processes and mediation efforts, (i) Strengthening efforts to realize the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for women and girls throughout their life course and without discrimination of any kind, and promoting their equitable, quality and affordable access to health and well-being for all, including towards the achievement of universal health coverage; and (j) Addressing hunger and malnutrition among women and girls by paying attention to their diverse nutritional needs at all stages of life.

A draft of the Political Declaration, which was based on recommendations of various regional consultative documents based on over 171 national level consultation assess-

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the landmark visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. 2020 is also the five-year milestone in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In recognition of this, the South Centre’s Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Gender (SDCCG) Programme is issuing this bi-weekly update on the state of play of discussions on gender and development issues in the context of the BPfA.

ments of the implementation of the Platform, was previously circulated and is available on the web.

In between the adoption of the BD & BPfA (1995) and the year 2020, there have been the 5th, 10th, 15th and 20th anniversary recognition and declarations by the CSW on the Platform. Additionally, the matter was addressed in the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly, “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”, and in a UN Women Report, *Gender Equality: Women’s Rights in Review 25 Years after Beijing*.

The present 25th anniversary Declaration recognizes the mutually reinforcing relationship between the Platform for Action and CEDAW and hence, calls upon Member States, who have not done so to date², to consider ratifying or acceding to the Convention and its Optional Protocol (adopted in 1999), and for gender responsive implementation of the sustainable development goals and agenda.

The Declaration also flagged the following important issues:

- Progress has not been fast or deep enough and in some areas progress has been uneven
- Major gaps and obstacles such as structural barriers, discriminatory practices and the feminization of poverty persist 25 years after Beijing
- No country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
- Many women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization throughout their life cycle; this group, which has made the least progress includes women of African descent, women with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), rural women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, migrant women and older women.

Proponents of the Political Declaration specified some specific means for tackling these gaps and challenges (they also pledged to take further concrete actions to address these issues), including:

- Eliminating all discriminatory laws;
- Breaking down structural barriers, discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes including in the media;
- Matching commitments to gender equality with adequate financing;
- Strengthening institutions to promote gender equality;
- Harnessing the potential of technology and innovation to improve women’s and girls’ lives;
- Regularly collecting, analyzing and using gender statistics; and

- Strengthening international cooperation to implement commitments to gender equality.

Future editions of this South Centre Beijing+25 Update Series will focus on exploring the regional reports as well as highlighting the findings of both the UN Women Report and the UN Secretary-General’s comprehensive stock-taking report on women’s rights in the lead up to the 75th UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Gender Equality in September 2020 as well as the numerous activities scheduled to take place under the umbrella Generation Equality, including the Generation Equality Forums, which will be led by UN Women, Mexico (May 2020) and France (July 2020).

Endnotes:

¹ This is a summary of the declaration. Fuller exposition can be found in UN document [E/CN.6/2020/L.1](#).

² To date only six countries – The US (signed), Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Palau and Tonga have not ratified CEDAW.

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The South Centre
Chemin du Champ d’Anier 17
PO Box 228, 1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: (4122) 791 8050
south@southcentre.int
<https://www.southcentre.int>

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