

**Final Declaration of the Asia and Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing +15:
Weaving Wisdom, Confronting Crises, Forging the Future
22-24 October 2009, Miriam College, Quezon City, Philippines**

Weaving Wisdom...

Acknowledging and recognizing the hard work and struggles of many women who have walked with us to this point and paying tribute to those who have passed on, we, close to 700 women and girls—representing women’s movements from the Asia and Pacific Region, reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) as a strategic document for women and girls empowerment, human rights, peace, human security and gender-inclusive development and as a key tool for advancing government’s commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. (MDGs)

We recognize and celebrate the contributions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) especially the women’s movements to advance women’s rights, to support the empowerment of women and girls, and to facilitate their access to social economic and political opportunities. We acknowledge the role played by these organizations in advocating with governments the principles and strategies to make societies free of poverty, violence, conflict and discrimination against women, and to achieve these goals through pursuit of democratic principles of dialogue, consensus building, transparency and respect for equity and plurality.

We welcome Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 that pave the way for supporting women’s rightful roles in all aspects of peace-making, conflict resolution and peace-building, including addressing gender based violence which seriously and adversely impact the security, health and education of women and girls. The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified in all but 4 countries in this region and as recommended in the BPFA, a number of countries have adopted national action plans on women’s rights and gender equality. Domestic laws and policies have been passed or are being formulated and regional initiatives undertaken to combat domestic and institutionalized violence against women. Some countries have instituted quotas or other affirmative measures to increase women’s political representation/ participation in decision making bodies.

We acknowledge the efforts of some countries in the region to improve health outcomes for women and girls and also that some countries have measures in place to reduce gender gaps in literacy and in primary and secondary education.

We welcome the September 14, 2009 Resolution of the General Assembly that finally delivered to women and women’s organizations the unanimous commitment of the United Nations member-states for the establishment of a new and ambitiously funded gender architecture to be led by an Under Secretary General.

We recognize the value of the BPFA in catalyzing women of different generations and abilities to organize, act and search for ways to strengthen and advance the position of

all women and girls across the region through and beyond crises. We acknowledge the importance of transferring the stories, wisdom and learnings gained during the 15 years since Beijing to younger women and girls who are critical to guiding the future. With the explosion of the new forms of technology and communication, women are using them to network, inform each other and to express themselves in ways they had not before. Women's movements have gained deeper understanding, expanded recognition, and broader definitions, perspectives and strategies related to effective and creative transnational networking and solidarity that advance plural and diverse social change agents and movements seeking gender justice.

Confronting crises ...

Despite these advances, we recognize the enormous and complex challenges still facing women and girls in the Asia and Pacific Region, especially, but not restricted to, growing food insecurity and negative impacts on livelihoods, the increasing impacts on women's rights, women and girls in situations of armed conflict, increasing violence against women and girls, restrictive economic frameworks and women and climate change . Among these are:

- The continued existence of discriminatory laws against women, discriminatory customary laws, particularly personal laws and the resistance of some countries to ratify CEDAW and the Optional Protocol as well as to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action, ICPD Program of Action and CEDAW, are concerns that remain to this day. Moreover, in some countries in the region, women rights activists are being persecuted, harassed, detained and prosecuted for speaking of women's rights. We are alarmed that some of our governments and certain political parties have resorted to manipulating the right of people to cultural and religious diversity as a pretext for violating human rights, including the rights guaranteed to women, girls, HIV AIDS survivors, and persons with diverse sexual orientations in which results in, among other outcomes, the penalizing, discrimination and criminalization of homosexuality in a number of countries across the region.
- Democracies are in distress. In many countries of the region, systematic persecution of legitimate dissenters and human rights defenders, especially women, and their families exists. Repressive political systems ban women's rights activists from joining international communities to share their experiences and media bans stop the information coming out. Women's NGOs are being shut down and women's rights activists are subject to harassment thus preventing them from playing their full role in supporting women's rights. Increasingly more conservative laws and discriminatory regulations are being introduced that escalate the denial to women and girls of their rights to education, health, mobility, employment, and reproductive and sexual services.

- Women continue to struggle for equal representation and engagement in the new technologies and media. In fact this medium which has exploded in the past 15 years, has not been women friendly and in many instances is being used as a tool that forges violence, subjugation and discrimination against women. Ways need to be found to democratize information, communication and media channels to affirm all aspects of women's lives, and to invest in research as to how the media and ICT is impacting on each of the 12 critical areas of concern.
- Prolonged political crises, religious extremisms, fundamentalisms and military dictatorships in some countries in the region continue to disproportionately create critical situations and insecurity for women and girls through violations of their human rights. The magnitude of violence against women and girls in armed conflict has not been recognized much less addressed, and those affected remain marginalized in conflict resolution and peace building processes while perpetrators of violence remain unpunished.
- Inter-state and intra-state conflicts continue to pose a great challenge to the lives and socio-economic conditions of women and girls. This is exacerbated in politically unstable countries and regions, where valuable resources that could benefit women and society are siphoned into military tools and militarization. Women and girls constitute some 80 per cent of the world's refugees and other displaced persons, including internally displaced persons (IDP), the needs of women and girls in IDP and refugee camps remain unaddressed, and urgent national and international action is needed to ensure their safety and security.
- Displacement of communities because of natural or man-made disasters such as armed conflicts, insensitive development initiatives leading to internal displacements, and economic displacements because of skewed economy policies increase women's vulnerabilities to stress, and social, sexual and economic exploitation.
- Violence against women has risen and despite some advances in this area, violence against women and girls across all geographic and demographic areas, remains a major concern in the Asia and Pacific region. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continues to mutilate and damage young girls and women. There are increasing reports of violent sorcery killings, witch hunts and honor killings of women and girls and rape as an instrument of war or colonization. Growing issues include new and pervasive forms of violence that are emerging alongside new media and technology with cyber bullying and violence becoming a rising problem for young girls.
- Threats to women's human rights take place amidst tremendous uncertainties and multiple crises in the financial, food, ecological, consumption,

health and reproduction spheres that have led to widespread economic displacements. The limited targets for poverty eradication as found in the Millennium Development Goals are almost certain to be missed, especially for women with disabilities and those in indigenous and marginalized communities. Priority is given to state security over human security in famine areas and HIV/AIDS affected communities. Sub-regional economic integration processes, including free trade agreements, in the region still rest on unsustainable production and consumption, wealth concentration and growing social gaps, and a disconnect between the productive and reproductive spheres of society.

- The dominant development paradigm continues to be guided by market ideology that favors growth of capital through privatization, trade liberalization, and rolling back the responsibilities of the State, at the cost of human well being of the poor, particularly the women amongst them. As a result, there is food insecurity, unemployment, and the consequent drastic impacts on the livelihood of the poor. Inequalities have increased even as economic growth is recorded in many countries of the region; such situations have led to protests which are often violently suppressed thereby leading to greater despair among the more marginalized and vulnerable, especially women and girls.
- Economic and climatic crises have increased the feminization of poverty. The global, financial crisis and its consequences impact on human security for women and children, resulting in a lack of sustainable livelihoods, increase in homelessness, poorer health outcomes, social isolation and increased violence against women.
- The brunt of debt burden of countries in the region is borne by women. States' foreign borrowings in the guise of national development and progress are not being utilized for the benefit of the population, especially women. Billions of dollars appropriated for draft repayments annually could greatly finance much needed basic social services to support women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, however corruption and bad deals means the money does not get down to where it is most needed.
- The worsening economic situation and global financial crisis has continued to impact most severely on women and girls. Girls and young women have been forced to leave school to enter the labor force and are pushed into domestic work, the entertainment industry and the sex trade. Desperate situations are driving increasing numbers of women and girls to find partners through the internet where they are "married" into domestic and sexual slavery. Women find themselves in foreign countries with little or no access to services or legal representation. The root causes of human trafficking in its various forms, including economic migration are not being addressed in program, policy and legislative areas.

- Women and girls are being disproportionately affected by the increasing frequency in the region of extreme climate instabilities and natural disasters which total nearly 50 percent more than the global average. This region has already witnessed the first relocation of communities due to rising sea levels and climate change and this will continue in small island states in our region. Natural disasters involve complex interactions of factors – climatic, social, political, economic, institutional and technological. There are also corporate-induced calamities from large-scale quarrying, mining, deforestation, construction of huge dams, increased pollution from the burning of fossil fuels, and conversion for commercial crop cultivation or urban enclaves, including proposed carbon reduction schemes that are causing havoc to communities. Recent super typhoons, tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, landslides, dust hurricanes, droughts and bush fires that have devastated many countries in the region and the effects of deteriorating bio-diversity due to climate change are seen more predominately in areas of spreading drought, and desertification. We lend our solidarity to all the Asia and Pacific victims of natural catastrophes, some of whom are among us in this forum, especially the poor who lost family members, crops, animals, abodes, and basic belongings, and the women who now face huge burdens of sustenance and care.

- Finally, most actors in development cooperation have shown inadequacy in making true gender equality commitments and money and resources have failed to match rhetoric. Implementation and accountability towards promoting women’s rights and gender equality through mainstreaming efforts have been ad hoc, unpredictable, inconsistent, and are vulnerable to hostile reaction. This inadequacy is linked to the lack of understanding of the diverse social, economical, cultural and political contexts that exist for women and the lack of strong national and international institutional mechanisms to bring about the desired changes in the current condition of women.

Forging the Future...

At this forum fifteen years after the **United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing** and in the midst of these major challenges, we declare our resolve to continue striving for development, peace and freedom throughout this world by actively working with young women and girls to strengthen the women’s movements across the region and by:

- Carrying on the spirit, progressively realizing the intent and building on and beyond the gains of the Beijing Platform for Action, in harmony with the Outcome Document of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly (2000) and all other UN documents that re-affirm the BPFA and support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

- Calling upon all remaining States to sign and ratify CEDAW and the CEDAW Optional Protocol. Further calling upon all States that have ratified CEDAW with reservations to remove them, and, in accordance with both CEDAW and the OP, States must revise all their discriminatory laws against women and implement the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Calling upon governments to strengthen national institutional mechanisms to function as the focal agencies to mainstream a gendered approach, ensuring adequate and appropriate staff and resources to advance the position of women and girls.
- Urging States to ensure adequate provision of appropriate resources that are crucial to advance the position of women and girls and to adopt democratic processes encouraging, promoting and protecting women's participation in leadership and decision making at all levels.
- Urging States to promote and protect women's human rights, defend women human rights defenders, and ensure the rights of women and girls who have experienced violence to gain truth, justice and recovery, and to support women and girls in their roles in building democracy in their countries and increasing the percentage of women in parliament.
- Calling for the abolition of discriminatory laws, discriminatory customary laws, particularly personal laws which adversely affect the rights of women with disabilities, Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and indigenous women and girls.
- Recognizing the use of media and new technologies and calling for the fuller democratization of information, communication and media channels and for increased investment in research on how the media and ICT is contributing to the affirmation of women's lives and concerns along the 12 critical areas of the BPFA.
- Urging states and UN bodies to fully implement UN Resolutions 1325, 1880, 1888 and 1889, and to ensure the participation and leadership of women in peace processes especially in efforts to bring lasting peace and end destructive wars and conflicts; further to bring about just and inclusive dialogue-based peace and processes which address the root causes of conflict through Security Council Resolutions and demilitarization by ensuring the availability of the necessary resources for women's peace and dialogue initiatives. We hold the UN Security Council and member states accountable for the full implementation of the resolutions regarding women, peace and security.

- Calling for States to bring an end to impunity by prosecuting and punishing those responsible for war crimes including violence against women in past and present conflicts and under the presence of foreign military forces, including taking the perpetrators of human rights violations to the International Criminal Court, including violations by paid mercenary forces, and making governments, private contractors and UN agencies more transparent and accountable for their inaction towards women and children's human rights, security and well being in conflict affected areas.
- Calling for States to halt arms manufacturing and take effective measures to curb arms proliferation, to start negotiating an International Convention to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons and to drastically reduce military spending and redirect resources to human needs, particularly for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality.
- Calling on governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing the global pandemic of violence against women and girls. To achieve , the adoption and enforcement of national legislation in line with international human rights standards (including the eradication of female genital mutilation) ; the adoption and implementation of multi-sectoral national action plans; the establishment of data collection and analysis systems , the establishment of national and/or local awareness-raising campaigns and systematic efforts to address sexual violence in conflict situations.
- Urging States, intergovernmental bodies, corporations, international finance institutions and development agencies to be guided by the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for development in the Asia and Pacific region as a means to prevent economic displacement, environmental devastation, loss of indigenous knowledge and integrity, subversion of rights and violence against indigenous women and girls.
- Supporting sub-regional economic integration processes and national development plans that rest on the principles and practices of ecological sustainability, food sovereignty, financial inclusion, universal social protection, economic solidarity and fair trade. Governments must stop selling or leasing large tracts of farmlands to multinational corporations. Governments need to be more transparent and accountable in their formal regional dialogues and agreements, and must interface with the private sector and civil society organizations, especially women's groups. We further commit to sustain our role as active advocates of socially-oriented and gender-responsive markets and economic cooperation systems by which we could better address issues of inequalities, poverty, discrimination, and deprivation, and where women are

visible and active as land owners, entrepreneurs, investors, and financial managers.

- Calling for governments in Asia and the Pacific heed climate change warnings and put an immediate stop to all ecologically destructive and extractive activities especially by large foreign corporations; ensure that reliable early warning systems for natural hazards are in place and that systematic attention to the specific needs of women and girls are integrated into disaster prevention and response and relief operations; and strengthen the capacities of local governments and the resilience of villages and communities, particular women, so that they can better protect themselves from the unpredictability of climate change. At the policy level, we demand that women, especially indigenous, marginalized and women with disabilities participate on equal terms in all decision making related to adaptation and mitigation measures.
- Working hard to ensure that the new gender architecture in the United Nations will have ambitious and adequate funding, effective field level presence and clear mechanisms and processes for engagement of women's organisations from the global, regional to the national spheres.
- Calling for the international community to create funds for gender equality.