

**Open letter to the United Nations Secretary General and UN Member States
Concerning the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
New York, March 4th, 2010**

Your Excellencies,

The 4th World Conference on Women produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), a comprehensive women's human rights paradigm that envisioned the transformation of power relations. This was a global vision of social justice, equality, development and peace. Fifteen years later, the BPfA would seem to be considered by governments a technical instrument, and its substance has been depoliticised and diluted. The key implementation strategy of gender mainstreaming has been disarticulated from its critical perspective in terms of power relations and inequalities within and between countries and regions.

Women's organizations have been the driving force behind the Beijing process, and the Secretary General has repeatedly emphasised the importance of civil society contribution to the work of the UN, particularly toward the achievement of women's rights. As representatives of such organizations we are deeply concerned that, despite the above, at CSW 54, the voices of women have effectively been silenced. This is manifested by:

- The Declaration having been agreed ahead of time and adopted without consultations with civil society
- The absence of information on opportunities for civil society to influence the conduct and outcome of the CSW meetings and the Declaration
- Poor logistics and facilities that prevent women from participating effectively, reflecting the lack of consideration given to the Beijing process.

The presence of such a huge gathering of women has been used instrumentally to legitimise an empty Declaration, another example of reducing space for engagement between governments and civil society.

The 54th Session of CSW was intended to be the opportunity to review progress and promote the implementation of the BPfA. However, the contents of the Declaration represent a step backwards by its failure to offer a new vision and mechanisms for implementation.

The Declaration appears to overstate the progress made, and to ignore its slow and partial nature. It also underestimates the degree and types of challenges that remain for women in their multiple identities including the persistence of all forms of violence against women. It also fails to take into account changes in the global and local contexts. The present context of multiple crises, such as food, climate, care and financial crises, new forms of insecurity, new aid modalities, and the ongoing struggle around women's health issues including Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV/AIDS have created challenges not present 15 years ago.

For this reason, we call upon the Secretary General and Member States to take all opportunities associated with the forthcoming global negotiations around the ECOSOC meeting and the MDG summit of 2010 to:

- Recapture the political nature of the BPfA
- Ensure that civil society, including women's organizations, is able to participate meaningfully and that young women are empowered to become future leaders of these processes.
- Commit to an accountability framework for BPfA with concrete benchmarks and timetables
- Ensure adequate funding for gender equality policies, programmes and institutional mechanisms and for women's rights organizations.
- Retain the primacy of the BPfA over the MDGs, for its comprehensive and human rights focus, and ensure that the MDGs draw on the BPfA as integral to all of them.
- Create in 2010 a strong UN Women's Rights and Gender Equality Entity as supported by the GEAR campaign

European Women's Caucus at CSW 54

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