

**Joint Statement of Women's Rights Civil Society Movements at the Asia-Pacific Civil Society Consultation for the 20-Year Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and for the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

## **Forever Forward, Never Backward**

Women's rights civil society movements from the Asia Pacific region<sup>1</sup> gathered at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok on 10-11 February 2014, call upon our region's governments to take this opportunity of the Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission of the Status of Women, to advance commitments related to gender equality and women's and girls' rights, development and empowerment within a vision of a regional community that enjoy development, economic, social, gender and environmental justice. We remind ourselves that the BPFA drew its mandate and inspiration from earlier global agreements, such as, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, International Conference on Population and Development, and Vienna Conference on Human Rights.

Twenty years ago, the world's leaders committed to collectively uphold the rights, and empowerment of women and girls at the Fourth World Conference on Women that produced an unprecedented document known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Five years later, the Millennium Declaration was adopted which reinforced the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity at the global level and reconfirmed, among others, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as, respect for the equal rights of all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

### **THE AMBITION OF THE MILLENIUM DECLARATION**

- We will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development. We resolve therefore: to respect fully and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to strive for the full protection and promotion in all our countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all; to strengthen the*

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*capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights, including minority rights; to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; to take measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families, to eliminate the increasing acts of racism and xenophobia in many societies and to promote greater harmony and tolerance in all societies...”<sup>3</sup>*

In imagining a future of fully inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development, the Millenium Declaration foreshadowed the potential for globalisation to be a force that threatens our collective progress by creating new levels of inequality: leaving the environmental, social, and economic costs to be borne by the many and the profits to largely accrue to a lucky few.

- *We believe that the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people. For while globalization offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed. We recognize that developing countries and countries with economies in transition face special difficulties in responding to this central challenge. Thus, only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable. These efforts must include policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation.*
  
- *Poverty eradication ... “depends on good governance at the international level and on transparency in the financial, monetary and trading systems. We are committed to an open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system.”*

The MDGs themselves did not reflect the ambition or commitment reflected in the Millenium Declaration, particularly for women. In fact, they had the perverse effect of diverting focus from existing, more ambitious and rights based commitments

Regrettably, we now see that the apprehension expressed in the declaration has been realised. Globalisation has led to wealth, power and resources accruing to a minority of the world's richest and most powerful people and corporations. Our world is now a plutocracy. Recent statistics revealed that the wealthiest 85 people in the world are now wealthier than half the world's population - 3.5 billion people. This model of wealth accumulation is directly responsible for the crises of inequality and of environment we now confront.

We endorse the Bangkok Declaration produced by 100 civil society organisations from the Asia Pacific region which called for a new model of development characterised as ‘**Development Justice**’. The delivery of Development Justice requires five transformative shifts that incorporate:

- Redistributive Justice,

- Economic Justice,
- Social Justice (including gender justice),
- Environmental Justice and
- Accountability to the peoples

At this Regional meeting, we call on our governments to deliver an outcome document that will reflect rights, development, empowerment and future aspirations of women and girls, as follows:

### Key Messages:

1. This must be the era of **ACCOUNTABILITY**. Strong normative standards and commitments exist but these commitments are rarely implemented and discarded at the altar of economic growth and political power.
2. A new development framework must be **TRANSFORMATIVE**. It must address the structural causes of inequality and marginalisation. It must address the convergence of the pernicious effects of globalisation, militarism and conflict and fundamentalisms that particularly target women's bodies and livelihoods.
3. The framework must include a strong stand-alone **GENDER GOAL** that address root causes of rights violations. And gender must be integrated throughout the framework.
4. The post2015 agenda must include an **INEQUALITIES GOAL** that aims to reduce inequalities of wealth, power, resources and opportunities between states, between rich and poor within states and between men and women. This goal must ignite macro-economic reform at the global and national level.
5. A new development agenda must address the **CLIMATE CRISIS** and the cause of the climate crisis – a refusal to limit production and consumption, particularly in the developed world.
6. The new development agenda must be underpinned by the principles of **HUMAN RIGHTS** and the **RIO PRINCIPLES**.
7. New global **PARTNERSHIPS** must result in strengthened partnerships amongst citizenry – that is citizens and those they charge with delivering sustainable development – their governments.

### MACROECONOMIC POLICY, UNPAID CARE WORK & SOCIALPOLICY

Women represent 70% of people living in poverty in the Asia Pacific. Nearly two-thirds of women work in 'vulnerable employment' that lacks basic security, benefits,

and working conditions. Moreover, Asia has the highest gender pay gap in the world.

In this conjuncture, addressing gender inequality requires us to examine and anticipate comparative impacts of macroeconomic policy and regulation on poor women and men. The contours of our political economy of development; the scope and composition of public expenditure; the features of public revenue collection; the impact of sector policies on employment; the profile of social policies, all these take place in a gendered terrain, where women remain by and large economically subordinated to men and therefore are affected differently by economic globalization.

As duty-bearers, states must be accountable and transparent to its rights-holding citizens. They must utilize maximum available resources not to bail out banks and companies, but to realize the economic, social and cultural rights of people, and in the context of the BPFA+20 Review, of women and girls especially.

### Recommendations:

1. Address the structural foundations and sources of gender inequality and injustice, including

- Macroeconomic policies, including government expenditures and revenue, fiscal, monetary and trade policies, as well as sector policies (for agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, and other industries and services) should be consistent with social equity and gender equality goals. It is an error to implement macroeconomic policies that focus on growth rates, trade volumes and financial targets alone without explicit social and environmental goals that aim first of all to improve people's quality of life, and maintain a sustainable ecosystem. In particular, economic investments and public policies should guarantee people's economic and social rights, rather than being driven by the financial interests of large corporations.
- Access to economic assets should be democratized. For this, inheritance, ownership, and financial rules and regulations norms should be revised and transformed so as to address structural barriers to women's access to and decision-making over financial, natural and other economic resources. Women, as the majority of subsistence farmers, are particularly vulnerable to the persistent land-grabbing and displacement occurring in the global south. The new development agenda must aim to ensure more equitable access to land and resources and secure tenure for women and communities.
- Inequity and inequality cannot be tackled just by attending to their manifestations, but instead by attacking their most profound sources. Redistributing wealth, opportunity, and power are key actions in this regard. For women, this includes reducing the heavy and inequitable burdens of unpaid care work.

- All public policies, including macroeconomic policies, should be evaluated for their impact on gender equity and equality, and data and statistical systems must be geared to support this.

## 2. Transform the gender division of labour by expanding care services and redistributing paid and unpaid work

- A fairer and more just social organization of care is needed in order to redistribute care responsibilities and the burden of paid and unpaid work. Expanding public care services and making them accessible to the needs of diverse households, is a key component of any redistribution strategy.

- The economic value of unpaid care work should be made explicit and considered in macroeconomic accounting and policies. The best way of recognizing the contribution of unpaid care work to economic development should be tailored to each national situation.

## 3. Remove persistent gender discrimination in the labour market and improvement of access to and decision making over resources and economic assets.

- Persistent mechanisms of gender discrimination in the labour market should be removed through a variety of measures, such as: enforcing standards and laws that penalize sex-segregation and gender-based discrimination at work; adopting legal frameworks and promoting concrete regulatory mechanisms for monitoring and implementation so as to guarantee equal pay for equal value of work; providing incentives for employers to expand jobs for women in sectors where gender disparity is wide; providing start-up incentives and resources for women-led businesses and training for women.

- Commit to a target to legislate and deliver a living wage for all workers particularly domestic workers, migrant workers, informal sector and garment workers where wages have been set using discriminatory assumptions about the sexual division of labour and dependents.

## 3. Commit to the provision of universal social incomes.

- Social protection institutions should be improved and expanded, especially as in many countries where informal work represents a large share of total employment. A rights-based commitment to universal social income policies might represent an innovative framework to advance universal social protection that incorporates both income and essential services and public goods.

## **WOMEN & CONFLICT**

Set-backs for the rights and development of women and girls has been affected by the persistence of violent conflicts. The war on terror and intra-state conflicts, including sectarian and ethnic-based conflicts undermine women's rights and the

achievement of development goals. No conflict or post-conflict country has achieved a single MDG.

Conflict is not gender-blind; it differently on girls, boys, women and men. Women's care role does not stop because of conflict; it only becomes extremely difficult even life threatening.

In order to address the different levels of vulnerability and inequalities, we strongly recommend governments to take a rights-based approach to address poverty and structural inequalities that create specific needs and constraints for ordinary women and girls in conflicts and post-conflict situations, such as:

- Utilise the existing commitments in GA Resolution 1325 and consequent resolutions and CEDAW GR 30 in the post2015 agenda
- Set targets to reduce military spending as a percentage of the national budget and as a comparison to social spending (i.e. health)
- Set targets to eliminate weapons within the community from both state and non-state actors
- Measure the number of military and non-state armed security in the population
- Create mechanisms to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict areas (20).

## **WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Disasters and climate change are closely related. As has been stated in the Asia Pacific Report 2010 –“people in Asia-Pacific are four times more likely to be affected by natural disasters than those living in Africa, and 25 times more likely than those living in Europe or North America. While the region generated only one quarter of the world's GDP, it accounted for a staggering 85% of deaths and 38% of global economic losses during 1980-2009.

We now look forward to gender equality being clearly and strongly represented as a core transformative necessity for the realization of sustainable development, where women are not just viewed as victims or end-users, but as strong, innovative contributors to the sustainability of the environment. We reiterate our call for a gender equality goal, with specific targets and indicators across all SDGs. We also point out that the most robust human rights and social justice framework is necessary as drivers of any sustainable development, and environmental rights as central, never as an externality. Without all this, we cannot have healthy ecosystems which will have tremendous impact on women's care burdens.

Also recalling specific focus on SIDs, LDCs, Africa and other special State circumstances; strongest work on sustainable consumption and production, and on oceans and seas, must be made. Coherency also necessitates alignment with the SIDs track; across UNFCCC negotiations. These SDG processes will lead a path in clarifying and highlighting the scale and urgency of climate change conditions, and

while not duplicating, can certainly set trends toward ambitious and legally binding climate change mitigation commitments, essential for health and sustainability of oceans, air and land.

Thirdly on urgency and scale of response, we call on governments, NGOs and scientific experts and advocates for specific attention to the so-called 'deadly trio' of cumulative impacts of global oceanic warming, sea level rise, and increased levels of de-oxygenation caused by coastal nutrient run-off, combining to destroy the protective shield the ocean provides against the worst effects of accelerating climate change and environmental degradation. The SDGs must measure and monitor both clearly visible and slow-onset issues -whether it involves king tides affecting drinking water salinity in small island states with attendant effects on SRHR, leading to drought and food insecurity; levels of nuclear radiation and mercury in seafood; bleaching and die-off of coral reefs; rising extinction rates of marine flora and fauna; increase in marine invasive species, loss of mangroves, sand dunes and coastal forests, and much more.

To recognise and address all this, there must be a biosphere approach to addressing oceans and sustainable development, clearly recognising the interdependence and interlinkage of marine, atmospheric and terrestrial ecosystems. What happens on air, land and sea is inherently connected, and influencing the planetary systems driving weather, water and food systems, biodiversity, and ultimately determining the extent of sustainable development. For many of us from small island states, the existential threat to our islands means this is about right to life, and right to development, as much as any other rights.

Finally, we must take caution with the re-emergence of views on a direct and simplistic connection between climate change and population growth, we must at the same time ensure that universal access of women and girls to a full range of sexual and reproductive rights, services and health must be preserved.

Climate issues and responses must

- Ensure the post2015 agenda honours and reflects the agreed Rio principles and in particular the principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibility and that of Polluter Pays.
- Includes an ambitious goal to foster a sustainable planet that operates within safe planetary boundaries and reduces carbon emissions.
- Ensure the active participation of women and girls in decision-making processes related to disaster risk prevention and preparedness, as well as post-disaster's assessments (etc.).
- Recognize the role of women in environmental regeneration and sustainability through their indigenous knowledge, skills on environmental management and on biodiversity conservation.
- Ensure that women and men have equal access to information (e.g. about disasters, assistance), to capacity building and technologies to reduce their vulnerability to disasters.

- Ensure that women and girls have access to adequate and comprehensive assistance including sexual and reproductive health and rights services during conflicts and disasters.

## **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

In September 2013, the Asia Pacific Region showed leadership when adopting the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development. We showed commitment to resolve, respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all women and girls including their sexual and reproductive rights, without which the ability to exercise other rights is significantly constrained. To protect and promote the well-being of women and girls, we urge Member States to reaffirm the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and its reviews, specifically on its core issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender, youth, and sustainable development and to draw inspiration from the Ministerial Declaration as an instrument for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific.

Member States have recognized that sexual and reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents, and rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, the right to attend the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, and the right to make decisions concerning reproduction and sexuality free of discrimination, coercion, and violence. Member States have expressed grave concern at acts of violence and discrimination committed against individuals on the grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity, and have promised to work to reduce vulnerability and eliminate discrimination based on sex, gender, age, race, caste, class, migrant status, disability, HIV status and sexual orientation and gender identity, or other status. It is crucial to take forward these principles of human rights, equality and social justice, in order to ensure a post2015 agenda that is truly effective, inclusive, places women and girls at the centre and tackles root causes of inequalities and discrimination.

Human rights, especially sexual and reproductive rights need to underpin the post 2015 agenda and call attention to the following:

Respect for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and young people, giving full attention to meeting their sexual and reproductive health, information and education needs, with their full participation and engagement, while respecting their privacy and confidentiality as well as removing legal, regulatory and social barriers to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services;

Assurance of sufficient resources and support for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes providing accurate and holistic information on human sexuality, gender equality, human rights, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health;



Integration of sexual and reproductive health services and programmes in response to gender-based violence, as part of a broader, multisectoral, coordinated response, including within maternal, newborn and child, adolescent and youth health, family planning and HIV-related services, and ensuring that all victims and survivors of violence have immediate access to critical services, including emergency contraception and safe abortion;

The review, and where appropriate, repeal of laws that punish women and girls who have undergone illegal abortions as well as their service providers, where applicable, as well as end their imprisonment for such acts, bearing in mind that in no circumstances should abortion be considered as a family planning method.

Lastly, gender equality can never be fully achieved without an inter-sectional approach to reproductive and sexual rights which include the right to sexual orientation and gender identity. Discriminatory laws and policies must be repealed. Sexual and reproductive rights are indivisible, inalienable, inter-related human rights which are fundamental to achieving gender equality and human development.

## **STAND ALONE GENDER GOAL WITH FOCUS ON VAW AND VOICE**

### **GENDER GOAL**

A commitment to a stand-alone gender goal should reflect genuine commitment to transforming power inequalities. It should not simply aim to guarantee women the equal right to live in poverty, nor the equal right to exploit other humans. We do not set our sites on women being half of the 85 world's plutocrats. Instead we urge states to see the whole framework as integrated and critical to delivering on promises for the full realisation of human rights.

Violence against women remains widespread, systematic, and culturally entrenched in the region. Women experience violence on a continuum that spans daily acts of harassment to murder, femicide, and the disappearance of women. The Pacific Islands are reported to have the highest rate of peace-time violence in the world, with 69% of women experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence.

Eliminating violence against women must be a target of the post2015 agenda. While governments have clear obligations to act with due diligence to eliminate violence already, we need to see clear targets and indicators. Indicators should include policy indicators (i.e. existence of national fully funded action plans), of prevalence (the number of women experiencing violence), of response (number of women securing justice responses), of perception (number of women who feel safe in their homes and their communities) and of attitudes (number of people who think it's acceptable to force women to have sex).

Ensure that all victims and survivors of all forms of gender-based violence, rape and incest, including indigenous people and people of various ethnicities and traditional communities, have immediate access to critical services, including: 24-hour hotlines; psychosocial and mental health support; treatment of injuries; post-rape care, including emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention

and access to safe abortion services; police protection; safe housing and shelter; documentation of cases, forensic services and legal aid; referrals; and longer-term support (6<sup>th</sup> APPC, para143).

Finally, Asia Pacific region remains below global averages in women's democratic leadership and voice with the Pacific region the lowest in the world.

Ensuring decision making of women in the home, in the community, in development planning and implementation, in national democratic spaces, at regional level and at international levels is critical. The new agenda should aim for parity of women in all decision making processes.

## CONCLUSION

Several states from the Asia Pacific region have expressed strong support for a transformative development agenda that aims to fully realise women's human rights and address the deep and growing inequalities of wealth, power, resources and inequalities between and within countries. Civil society is ready and willing to work with governments to realise the collective, ambitious vision of equitable and sustainable development.

In particular we see the need to work with governments to more clearly specify the **Accountability** mechanisms and the **Means of Implementation** that will make this consensus more than rhetoric.

## ACCOUNTABILITIES

Accountability mechanisms at the international, regional, national and local levels need to be strengthened and enforceable. We endorse the call from UNCTAD and expressed in the Millennium declaration for new, democratic *open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial systems that have the realization of development rights at their core.*

Partnerships between civil society and decision makers at all levels will allow for greater accountability, civic participation, monitoring and evaluation. A recognition that partnerships between the state and constituents is the primary partnership needs to be central to the agenda.

Multi-stakeholder decision making bodies at the local, national, regional and international level should include reserved space for women's civil society representation to strengthen accountability and participatory democracy for women.

Member states and UN Agencies have recognised the importance of civil society and public engagement and voice on the post2015 agenda. The MDGs lacked any national level debate and, as a consequence, local ownership is often lacking. We encourage states to

1. Foster national debate and dialogue around the new development agenda – in media, parliament and community consultative processes
2. Include civil society in delegations to CSW and other intergovernmental spaces
3. Share national statements with civil society prior to CSW and post2015 processes
4. Register panels at CSW in collaboration with civil society
5. Work with civil society to review implementation of Beijing +20
6. Sex disaggregated data must be institutionalized at all levels and data gathering must be predictable, regular and consistent.

Thank you.