

**EGM/B20 /INF.1**  
**October 2014**  
**ENGLISH ONLY**

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UN Women  
**Expert Group Meeting**  
**Envisioning women's rights in the post-2015 context**

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New York, New York  
3-5 November 2014

**Concept Note**

## **I. Background and objectives**

1. The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2015 will conduct a global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and consider opportunities for strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.
2. Intergovernmental processes are well under way to inform and design the future post-2015 development agenda. The 59th session of the CSW will provide an important opportunity to reflect on progress made towards gender equality in the last twenty years, to identify the multiple challenges that have held back progress as well as to consider effective strategies for advancing women's rights in the post-2015 context.
3. In order to take stock of current research and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN Women will convene an expert group meeting (EGM) on 'Envisioning women's rights in the post-2015 context' from 3-5 November 2014 in New York. In the context of the 20 year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the EGM will:
  - Identify the constraints and challenges that have held back progress towards gender equality;
  - Identify the priorities and critical issues for advancing women's and girls' human rights; and
  - Develop action-oriented recommendations to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' human rights in the post-2015 context.
4. The EGM will focus on four cross-cutting themes that are particularly relevant for understanding current constraints and challenges for achieving gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' human rights:
  - Strategies and pathways to make states more accountable for women's rights
  - Feminist responses to extremism and backlash against women's rights
  - Understanding discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes
  - Transforming the economy for the realization of women's rights

## **II. Global legal and policy framework**

5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. It calls on State Parties to take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.”<sup>1</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378, Article 3. See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also require State Parties to ensure that the rights within each covenant are enjoyed without discrimination on the basis of sex.

6. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by 189 Member States in 1995, is a global agenda for women's human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action (BPfA) covers 12 critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child. For each critical area of concern, strategic objectives are identified, as well as a detailed catalogue of related actions to be taken by Governments and relevant stakeholders, at national, regional and international level. At the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, Governments reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and agreed on further actions to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace are fully realized.
7. In the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Governments reached a consensus that gender equality and empowerment of women is a global priority. It highlights a number of critical areas for advancing gender equality and empowering women, including universal access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights; equal access to education for girls; equal sharing of responsibilities for care and housework between women and men; individual, social and economic impact of urbanization and migration; and sustainable development and environmental issues associated with population changes.
8. Adopted at the Millennium Summit on 8 September 2000, the Millennium Declaration built upon the outcomes of the major summits and world conferences of the 1990s. Governments also confirmed their resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to promote sustainable development. The importance of ensuring equal human rights of women and men, combatting all forms of violence against women and the implementation of CEDAW were also highlighted in the Declaration. Inspired by the Millennium Declaration, the eight Millennium Development Goals were introduced, accompanied by a set of time-bound targets due to expire in 2015. The 58<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women considered the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls as the priority theme. In its agreed conclusions, Member States stressed that while the Millennium Development Goals have advanced progress for women and girls in some areas, overall progress has been slow and uneven. They also underlined that progress on the achievement of all MDGs has been held back due to pervasive historical and structural unequal power relations between women and men.
9. As mandated in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals was established in January 2013. The Open Working Group

concluded its work on 19 July 2014 and agreed on a proposed framework that sets out 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030, with targets and means of implementation. The proposed goal to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (Goal 5) includes six substantive targets that go well beyond Millennium Development Goal 3, which has only one target to eliminate gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015. The targets capture key structural constraints to gender equality such as discrimination, violence against women and girls, harmful practices, unpaid care work, participation in decision-making and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Following intergovernmental negotiations that will take place from January 2015, the final post-2015 development agenda should be adopted at a summit in September 2015.

### **III. Background on meeting and key issues**

10. Twenty years have now passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women which set out an expansive vision and set of commitments for achieving gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Building on previous conferences of the 1990s, women’s rights movements brought to the fore the multitude of human rights violations experienced by women and girls and the need to transform institutions, both formal (e.g. states, markets, national and global governance) and informal (e.g. family, community), to achieve substantive equality for women.
11. To date we have seen progress, though uneven, across and within countries, in some areas such as girls’ education, women’s labour market participation, women’s political participation, the adoption of laws to promote gender equality and address violence against women and girls, and the advancement of the global women, peace and security agenda. However, women’s educational attainment and rising participation in the labour market has not been matched with better conditions, prospects for advancement and equal pay. Heavy and intense unpaid care workloads continue to limit women’s enjoyment of human rights. Violence against women and girls persists in many forms and women’s sexual rights remain deeply opposed. Women continue to be excluded from decision-making at all levels.
12. The broader political, social and economic context has been enabling on some aspects of gender equality, but disabling and even harmful in other areas. The succession of global crises have thrown into sharp relief the shortcomings of dominant neo-liberal economic models that have deepened inequalities (both within and between countries) and increased vulnerabilities of marginalized groups. Inequality is on the rise and has been identified as one of the proximate causes of the global financial crisis which, along with the food crisis, has had large negative impacts on people, with significant implications for women and girls. Achieving gender equality in the post-2015 context will require transforming the economy to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities and realize the human rights of all.

13. Rising conservatism and extremism of various shades across many countries have led to major retreats on women's rights. Extremism manifests in diverse forms across different contexts, but a common feature is the resistance on women's rights, for example restricting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, tolerating violence against women and limiting women's and girls' autonomy and engagement in the public sphere. In the context of the 20 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is vital to understand the drivers of conservatism and extremism and identify effective feminist responses.
14. Discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes are pervasive across formal and informal institutions and continue to hold back progress towards gender equality. For example, discriminatory social norms and stereotypes that are embedded in labour markets, such as the gendered division of both paid and unpaid work and stereotypes of men as breadwinners, limit women's enjoyment of social and economic rights. Discriminatory social norms and practices that underlie women's unequal access to land and other productive resources limit women's enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living. Social norms that condone violence against women and girls prevent them from full and equal participation in social, economic and political life. These entrenched social norms at all levels prevent the transformation of gendered power relations that is necessary to realize substantive equality for women.
15. Despite these obstacles in the broader context, many countries have made important advances to realize women's rights. The role of women's organizations in building constituencies to advance women's rights is recognized as the most critical factor in the implementation of gender equality policies. International mobilizations by feminist organizations around the world have served to produce several 'paradigm shifts' in the international human rights agenda, including the recognition of women's rights as human rights, recognition of violence against women as a public concern, and the recognition of unpaid care work as a public good. As part of the 20 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is important to understand the strategies and mechanisms that women's rights advocates have deployed to make states more accountable for women's rights and why we have seen more progress in some areas of gender equality and less progress in others.

#### **IV. Profile of participants**

16. The EGM will be attended by approximately 20 relevant experts appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations that are working on the MDGs, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN Women will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.

17. Observers from the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM at their own expense.

## **V. Documentation**

18. The documentation for the meeting will include:
- Draft background papers commissioned by UN Women as follows:
    - Strategies and Pathways to Makes States more Accountable for Women's Rights, authored by Andrea Cornwall, University of Sussex.
    - Extremism in the Mainstream: Implications for Women's Rights, authored by Sanam Anderlini and Madeline Koch, ICAN.
    - Gender norms and stereotypes: A survey of concepts, research, and issues about change, authored by Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse, University of Sydney.
  - Expert papers
    - Gender equality and economic growth: a view from below, authored by Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics and Political Science.
    - Gender, education and labour market outcomes, authored Dorrit Posel and Daniela Casale, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

## **VI. Organization**

19. The EGM will be convened by UN Women from 3-5 November in New York. The meeting will be held at Glen Cove Mansion.
20. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.
21. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. Presentations by the experts in plenary will create the framework for discussions. Experts will work in small working groups to discuss specific issues/themes and draft concrete policy and programme recommendations targeted at various stakeholders. The recommendations of working groups will be reviewed and finalized in plenary.
22. Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and the preparation of the EGM report.

## **VII. Expected outcome**

23. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN Women.