

**Consolidated Statement by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar,
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The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Executive Director of UN Women,
Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

Much has been achieved on gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific despite the region's diversity in both its levels of development and social gaps. Yet there remains much scope for further progress in this region, representing almost 60 percent of the world's women and girls.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference, convened by ESCAP last November, stands out for its progressive agenda, candid and substantive exchanges, and agreed outcomes, which will guide the region in moving forward.

Bringing together over 700 representatives from 50 countries, inclusive of Governments, civil society and development partners, the Conference adopted, by consensus, the "*Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*".

Validating the continuing relevance of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Ministerial Declaration sets forth key priorities for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the Asia-Pacific region over the next five years.

Let me take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to ESCAP member States for their active engagement in the Beijing+20 review process. I would also like to thank UN Women for its ongoing support of ESCAP's work.

The progressive outcome and consensus reached by ESCAP member States at the Conference will:

1. Ensure continued political commitment at the highest level;
2. See adoption of a whole-of-government approach, which recognizes the critical importance of gender equality in poverty reduction, inclusive growth and sustainable development; and
3. Nurture an enabling policy and legal environment to promote women's leadership in all sectors of society and ensure the promotion of women's and men's equal rights.

I will now briefly outline the key findings of our Asia-Pacific Beijing+20 deliberations, and highlight the priorities of ESCAP member States in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Achievements and Challenges in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific

Significant progress has been made on many fronts but, as noted by our member States, challenges remain across the critical areas of concern.

Education

Gender parity in primary education – a key MDG target – has been achieved, with the gender gap in attendance reducing at the secondary level, and more women than men attending tertiary institutions in some countries.

We recognize, however, that gender equality in education goes well beyond ensuring equal enrolment rates of boys and girls, with measures needed to address the quality of education and issues such as violence in schools.

Health

In terms of health, Asia-Pacific has made significant strides in reducing maternal mortality rates. Since 1990, the maternal mortality ratio has fallen by 61 per cent – a rate of reduction faster than the global average of 46 per cent. The general life expectancy of women has also risen in every country in the region.

Yet, as many as 250 women still die every day in the Asia-Pacific region due to complications during pregnancy or at childbirth. Access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, especially for youth, is one key means to reduce these deaths.

Power and Decision-Making

Turning to leadership, there are more women in leadership positions in Asia and the Pacific compared to 20 years ago. Eighteen women have served or currently serve as Heads of State. The proportion of women in national parliaments has risen from 8 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent in 2014.

Yet the region still has the world's second lowest proportion of women parliamentarians. Removal of policy and legal barriers, capacity-building, eliminating prejudices about women's leadership and proactive measures, such as quotas, will help to promote equal representation of women and men in leadership and decision-making positions.

Women and the Economy

Moving to economic empowerment, women in the region are increasingly entering the entrepreneurial world. More women now own and manage micro- and small enterprises.

Yet, the gender gaps in economic participation have barely changed in the last 20 years, and are as high as 50 per cent in South Asia and 23 per cent in South-East Asia and the Pacific. Women, more than men, are engaged as family workers or in vulnerable employment. The gender wage gap – which is 20 per cent at the regional level – also remains.

Violence Against Women

Turning to violence against women and girls, governments have highlighted progress in relation to: the introduction of legislation; strengthened law enforcement capacity; establishment of government entities tasked to address this specific issue; and awareness-raising in communities.

Notwithstanding such measures, between 25 and 70 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years face violence at the hands of an intimate partner, with severe consequences for women and their families, and of significant economic and social cost to countries.

Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change and disasters. This is increasingly recognised by governments across the region, with commitments to integrate gender into climate and disaster risk reduction policies and plans.

Normative Frameworks and Institutional Mechanisms

Governments have highlighted the adoption of normative frameworks, policies, legislation and institutional mechanisms for achieving gender equality; the fortification of the status and mandates of national women's machineries; and the expansion of gender mainstreaming across the public sector.

The challenge lies in the implementation and monitoring of the normative frameworks, alongside strengthened coordination and capacity among government entities and the production of comprehensive gender statistics.

Asia-Pacific Priority Areas for Action

Embracing the continued relevance of the Beijing Platform for Action, through the adoption of the "Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration", Governments in our region have committed to accelerating action on gender equality in five ways:

1. **Strengthening institutions**, including the capacities of national women's machineries to mainstream the needs and interests of women and girls in national policies, legislation, and public institutions;
2. **Increasing financing for gender equality** and ensuring effective gender-responsive planning and budgeting; supporting multi-sectoral and dedicated funding mechanisms; and actively engaging the private sector;
3. **Enhancing accountability** through the improved production, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, as well as robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems;
4. **Forging stronger partnerships** within government entities, between government and civil society, and with the private sector; and
5. **Strengthening regional cooperation**, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and the sharing of good practices among member States.

Priorities for ESCAP's Work

In the coming years, the new global development agenda will be reinforced by regional endeavours and priorities. In the context of a post-2015 development agenda, the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration calls for harnessing financing and innovative funding mechanisms and augmenting accountability and partnerships to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, from the local to the national levels.

To support implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, ESCAP will be focusing on five action areas in line with the priorities adopted by our member States during the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference:

1. Strengthening accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment

As mandated by the Economic and Social Council, ESCAP leads the intergovernmental platform for review and monitoring of the Asia-Pacific region's implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action every five years.

The realization of gender equality is central to the post-2015 development agenda, and ESCAP will intensify its efforts in building national capacity to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Among others, we plan to focus on strengthening gender statistics including a set of regional core indicators to track implementation of the "Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality."

2. Increasing financing for gender equality

Second to building capacities, greater financial investments and appropriate allocation will contribute to furthering gender equality and women's empowerment. ESCAP plans to:

- Conduct in-depth research on the state of funding for gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Identify innovative funding mechanisms and tracking systems;
- Review macro-economic policies and enhance capacity for implementing gender-responsive budgeting; and
- Encourage private sector engagement in the development, implementation and monitoring of gender equality initiatives.

3. Enhancing women's economic empowerment

To promote women's economic empowerment, ESCAP will continue its work in research, policy advocacy and capacity building, aimed at creating an enabling environment for enhancing women's economic empowerment. For example, ESCAP is working on a subregional strategy for enabling women's entrepreneurship in the context of ASEAN economic integration by the end of 2015.

4. Gender equality resource facility

In support of the above-mentioned initiatives, ESCAP will establish an online gender equality resource facility. This facility will provide Governments and stakeholders with both cross-cutting and sector-specific knowledge, tools and technical support to address gender issues, including identification of channels for accessing innovative financing for gender equality.

5. Coordination and partnerships

ESCAP, in cooperation with UN Women, leads and coordinates the regional UN inter-agency platform – the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) Thematic Working Group

on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. This Group undertakes joint planning and implementation of gender equality programmes that cut across the work of the UN and related entities, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the development agenda beyond 2015.

I believe inclusive and mutually accountable partnerships are vital for accelerated action to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. ESCAP intends to build a strong alliance of governments, the United Nations and other development partners, civil society organizations, educational and research institutions, the private sector and philanthropic organizations, towards full and effective implementation of the “Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”.

Conclusion

The ESCAP region is characterized by diversity, disparities and differing levels of development. Despite that, through the regional Beijing+20 review, our member States were able to focus on commonalities, share experiences and good practices, and strategize on the way forward to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in all 12 Critical Areas. They stressed the value of regional cooperation, particularly the inclusive platform provided by ESCAP for regional dialogue and promotion of evidence-based policies and programmes.

It is expected that our member States will fulfil the commitments made in the “Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”, particularly through:

- a. Ensuring political commitment at the highest level; and
- b. Adopting a whole-of-government approach that recognizes the critical importance of gender equality in poverty reduction, inclusive growth and sustainable development.

I would like to thank all ESCAP member States for their support in ensuring the success of the Beijing+20 review in Asia and the Pacific. We are also grateful for their strong commitment for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender in all areas to ensure the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the post-2015 era.

We all want to see an Asia-Pacific where women and girls live free from poverty, free from violence and free from discrimination. The ESCAP Secretariat stands ready to support our governments in making that a reality for all.

Thank you.
