

UN Fifth World Conference on Women (5WCW)

Concept paper

Introduction:

The Fifth World Conference on Women of the United Nations would be the first to be held in the 21st Century, the first since the widespread reach of information and communication technology. The target date for the conference would be 2015, 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The most deeply held beliefs and values of all societies are reflected in their organization of gender relationships. To date there is no country in the world that has achieved total equality between women and men, and these inequalities have an impact in all spheres of activity, be they political, economic or social. Women in all parts of the world suffer from gender inequality manifested mostly in strict division of labour, less access to decision-making positions, fewer opportunities of participation in political life and less value accorded to the roles they play and consequently inequitable gender relations. Barriers confronting the progress of women and obstructing the realization of gender equality in today's world are partly due to the inability to promote change of mindset and attitudes as well as to dismantle the traditional institutional structures that can promote women's equal rights.

Rationale:

The potential of a Fifth World Conference on Women as a consciousness raising focus is enormous. Development of the next generation of global and local women leaders will grow out of such a conference. Building on and benefiting from the synergy and awareness that grew out of the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, the Fifth Conference would bring current and future women leaders together, creating and mobilizing effective intergenerational leadership. Effectively and creatively prepared, it could be the most influential women's conference ever with simultaneous and interactive conference linkages and access to individuals with opportunity to participate through the internet. A Fifth World Conference on Women would be the first to make widespread use of the internet and associated technologies to bring women's issues and solutions to worldwide attention.

The conference would raise awareness that the planet and humanity need to have women – fifty percent of global population - involved at every level for there to be peace and sustainability in the world. It would provide a platform for voicing the concerns that women and mothers universally have about their children's future and help create the political will necessary to create a world where children, and therefore everyone, would not fear physical or psychological violence, and where there would be better access to food, clean air and water, health, education, housing and other basic services as well as the opportunity to think, speak, create and love in an environment of global understanding and solidarity. A Fifth Conference would energize the global women's movement towards this end.

The Beijing Platform for Action has identified the critically important areas for action at national, regional and global levels. Since then, it is evidenced that new developments have added new and often complex dimensions to these areas challenging the prospects of their full and effective implementation. Conflict, war, civil strife and post-conflict situation have manifested in a widespread and interconnected manner seriously undermining prospects for women's equality and for their due role. Of course, adoption of the UNSCR 1325 in 2000 opens up new opportunities for women in this context. Commitments made in Beijing and subsequent conferences in respect of rural women and girls so that they can enjoy a full range of rights – from property and inheritance, to health, education and freedom from violence – call for much-needed engagement for their full realization. The UN Human Development Report of 2009 identified abused and coerced women as one of the most important vulnerable groups that are victimized in their own families and societies. Violence, trafficking, drugs, migration, environmental degradation including climate change, media bias, low participation in the decision-making process, commercialization, globalization – all have accentuated increasing obstacles to women's equality since Beijing. While the enormous potential of the information and communication technology (ICT) helps interconnection, networking and mobilization of women and assists in their empowerment, the negative dimensions of that opportunity has been a major concern for women. In brief, “strategic interests” such as political participation, freedom from gender based violence, equal access to decent work and equal access to decision - making positions need to be addressed in a holistic manner.

All of the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted after Beijing, require the empowerment and equality of women in order to be implemented. All eight Goals touch essential aspects of women's well-being and, in turn, women's empowerment is critical for achieving the goals.

Organizational arrangements:

With the support of its 193 member states, the United Nations General Assembly need to adopt a resolution at its 66th regular session in 2011 to convene 5WCW in 2015. It would ask the UNSG to report by June 2012 the preparatory arrangements and other details needed for successful holding of the conference. An open-ended preparatory body with the active participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) would be suitable for carrying out the needed preparatory work through the support of the UN Women secretariat.

Civil Society role:

Advocacy for 5WCW is a grassroots, civil society effort that began in 2002 by women participating in parallel events during the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings. A turning point of NGO support came at the 2011 CSW meetings. The number of civil society organizations signing an online petition supporting 5WCW continues to increase. New internet conference platforms are drawing thousands of participants where 5WCW is the subject. To be worthwhile and purposeful, consideration of the issues before 5WCW requires active participation of civil society and giving it the opportunity to reach out to public policy level. The power of civil society lies mainly in its connection and reflection of needs and hopes of ordinary women on the ground. Collaboration and partnership between government and civil society is, therefore, of great importance.

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