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**Asia-Pacific region urges more holistic approach to achieving gender equality – (10 September 2004)**

Recommitting themselves to achieving gender equality and empowering women for decades to come, countries from Asia and the Pacific meeting at the United Nations regional commission in Bangkok (ESCAP) today called for a more all-embracing approach to understanding the issue.

At a high-level intergovernmental meeting convened at [ESCAP](#) to review achievements, gaps and challenges since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, participants agreed on the need to promote economic and social rights, work with men to achieve gender equality, and forge partnerships.

The four-day meeting, which ended in the Thai capital today, highlighted five levels of partnerships: between men and women; between governments and civil society; among government ministries; between and among countries in terms of regional cooperation on trans-boundary issues such as trafficking, migration and the spread of HIV/AIDS; and at the global level.

Its recommendations and strategies will serve as the regional input to the global review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action – adopted at the 1995 conference – to be held next March. More than 450 delegates from over 40 countries attended, including ministers or government representatives, participants from numerous civil society organizations, and officials from UN agencies and their development partners.

Delegates reported significant progress since 1995 including national action plans to promote gender equality, improvements in women's health, longer life expectancy, revision of discriminatory domestic laws and regulations, and affirmative measures to improve women's political participation.

They also stressed increased basic education levels and significant decrease in women's illiteracy rate, as well as poverty reduction and alleviation through providing small loans known as "micro credit," encouraging female entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities.

But several countries identified persisting common gaps and challenges such as women's disproportionate representation among the poor, the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among women, low level of women's participation in the decision-making at various levels and all forms of violence against women, including trafficking.