

# **Expert Group Meeting in Preparation for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Bangkok, 13-15 May 2009**

## **AIDE MEMOIRE**

### **I. Introduction**

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will organize an expert group meeting (EGM) in Bangkok from 13 to 15 May 2009. The EGM is in preparation for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, in October 2009, to review the implementation in the Asia-Pacific region of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000).

The objective of the expert group meeting is to formulate the conceptual and organizational framework for the October 2009 High-level Intergovernmental Meeting and identify key emerging, neglected and high priority issues that need attention in the context of this review. The outcome of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting will be an input to the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA, to be carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its fifty-fourth session in 2010.

### **II. Background**

In September 1995, government delegates and non-governmental organization (NGO) observers gathered in Beijing, China for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Delegates met for two weeks to finalize a Platform for Action aimed at achieving greater equality and opportunities for women. The Beijing Conference followed three previous World Conferences in Mexico City (International Women's Year, 1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985).

By the close of the Conference, representatives from 189 countries voted unanimously to adopt the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, reflecting a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere.

The Beijing Platform for Action identifies 12 “critical areas of concern” considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement. The critical areas are: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

The Platform defines strategic objectives and spells out actions to be taken by governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

#### ***“Beijing+5”***

Five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century,” was held from 5 to 10 June, 2000. The goal of the “Beijing+5” meeting was to review and

assess progress achieved and to consider future actions to further implementation of the *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* (adopted in 1985) and the BPfA.

The Beijing+5 Outcome Document strengthened commitments to eradicate harmful traditional practices, including so-called “honour killings”, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Among other things, it also called upon governments to eliminate gender discriminatory legislation by 2005 and improve access to affordable treatment and care for women and girls living with HIV and AIDS. Additionally, the language of the outcome document reflected growing concern about the effects of globalization on women and girls as well as rape as a weapon in conflict.

#### *Beijing+15*

For the “Beijing+15” review, the five United Nations regional commissions are organizing regional reviews and appraisals of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, regional platforms for action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). The review and appraisal in 2010 by the CSW will identify achievements, gaps and challenges and provide an indication of areas where actions and initiatives, within the framework of the BPfA and the outcome of the special session (Beijing+5), are most urgent to further implementation.

ESCAP will organize a High-level Intergovernmental Meeting tentatively scheduled for 27 to 29 October 2009 to review implementation in the Asia-Pacific region of the BPfA and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). The output of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting and similar meetings of other regional commissions will be used in documentation prepared for the 2010 session of the CSW.

A questionnaire was sent by ESCAP to all its Member States. Information from responses to the questionnaire as well as from sources such as reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will be used by ESCAP in preparing a background paper for the EGM focusing on the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and emerging as well as neglected issues.

### **III. Objectives**

The objective of the EGM is to formulate the conceptual and organizational framework for the October 2009 High-level Intergovernmental Meeting. Specifically, the EGM will:

1. Identify and analyze current priority challenges in the region - neglected, persistent and emerging - which hamper women's empowerment, such as the social and economic impact of the global economic crisis, violence against women; climate change, risks of food and energy security, absence of women in key decision-making arenas and processes; descrimination and denial of human rights; information and communication technology and the impact of armed conflict on women and their participation in conflict resolution. Consider and recommend necessary actions to address such challenges.
2. Propose an agenda for the High-level Meeting and organizational framework with which to prioritize the thematic and structural elements of the meeting; the agenda should reflect reporting on implementation of the Platform for Action, incorporating good practices and effective strategies being employed by the various actors accountable for implementation.
3. Develop a conceptual framework for the High-level Meeting to allow Governments to discuss and analyze specific country experiences in implementing the BPfA and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The framework should facilitate

- A discussion of the *major* achievements and obstacles encountered in implementation since 1995 – in particular since 2005 – on the part of governments and efforts to promote an active and visible policy of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes.
- Deliberations that differentiate outputs and actions from achievements and impacts with regard to the situation of women and promotion of gender equality.

#### **IV. Organization and format of the EGM**

The three-day EGM will be organized and hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok in the United Nations Conference Centre.

Approximately ten experts will be invited from across Asia-Pacific to deliberate on various emerging aspects of gender equality and empowerment issues most relevant to the region. Government delegates, NGO representatives and UN agency representatives are welcome to join the meeting as observers. At the conclusion of the EGM, participants are expected to adopt the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. A final report will be produced after the meeting.

#### **V. Documentation**

The ESCAP secretariat will prepare an overview document in which information on the persistent, neglected and emerging challenges to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Asia-Pacific region will be compiled.