

UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 5+)

In 1995, delegates from 189 countries gathered in Beijing at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women to discuss the status of women worldwide and adopt a program for action. At Beijing, governments reaffirmed their recognition of reproductive rights as human rights and made commitments to secure these essential guarantees for women all over the world.

Mission of the Conference:

The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development. A sustained and long-term commitment is essential, so that women and men can work together for themselves, for their children and for society to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. As an agenda for action, the Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.

The Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world. It respects and values the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognizes that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment.

The Platform for Action requires immediate and concerted action by all to create a peaceful, just and humane world based on human rights and fundamental freedoms,

including the principle of equality for all people of all ages and from all walks of life, and to this end, recognizes that broad-based and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development is necessary to sustain social development and social justice. The success of the Platform for Action will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels.

12 Areas of Concern:

To provide a basis for preparatory discussions and final negotiations at the Beijing Conference, the UN Commission on the Status of Women has issued a draft Platform for Action, focusing on 12 "critical areas of concern" that have been identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. Related to these concerns, the draft proposes to:

Women and Poverty

- Create social security systems wherever they do not exist.
- Develop gender-sensitive national and international policies, including those related to structural adjustment.
- Provide poor women with economic opportunities and equal access to affordable housing, land, natural resources, credit and other services.
- Devise statistical means to recognize and make visible the work--including unpaid and domestic--of women and their contribution to national economies.

Education and Training of Women

- Closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005.
- Eradicate illiteracy of women worldwide by 2000 or another target date to be agreed at the Conference.
- Improve women's access to and provide funding for vocational training, science and technology.
- Develop curricula, textbooks, and teaching aids free of gender stereotypes.

Violence against Women

- Take integrated legal and social measures to prevent violence and protect women.
- Adopt measures to eliminate trafficking in women and eradicate violence against women who are vulnerable, such as those with disabilities and migrant workers.

- Study the causes of violence against women and effective measures of prevention.

Women and Armed Conflict

- Increase and strengthen women's participation in conflict resolution.
- Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- Reduce the incidence of human rights abuses in conflict situations protect refugee and displaced women, and provide assistance to women of the colonies.

Women and the Economy

- Enact laws to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work, and adjust work patterns to promote the sharing of family responsibilities.
- Provide women with equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade, as well as to information and technology.
- Eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination in the workplace.

Human Rights of Women

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- Encourage ratification of international human rights treaties and promote their implementation.
- Provide gender-sensitive human rights training to public officials.
- Improve access to legal services and literacy through information campaigns and national training programmes.

Women and Media

- Take steps to ensure women's access to information and the media on an equal basis.
- Encourage elimination of gender stereotyping in the media through studies, campaigns and various forms of self-regulation by media organizations.

Women and Environment

- Involve women in environmental decision-making and integrate gender concerns in policies for sustainable development.
- Assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

Women and Health

- Strengthen and reorient health services in order to reduce maternal mortality by at least 50 per cent of the 1990 levels by the year 2000.

- Strengthen preventive programmes that address threats to women's health.
- Make efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and recognize the impact of those diseases on women.
- Promote research on and increase funding for women's health issues and services.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

- Ensure women's full and equal participation in power structures and decision-making.
- Develop education and training to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.
- Aim at gender balance in government bodies and the composition of delegations to the UN.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

- Ensure that responsibility for the advancement of women is invested at the highest level of Government.
- Integrate gender perspectives in all legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.
- Collect and disseminate statistics showing gender impact of policies and programmes.

The Girl Child

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination, as well as negative cultural attitudes and practices, against girls.
- Ensure that girls develop a positive self-image and have equal access to education and health care.
- Protect girls from economic exploitation and eliminate violence against them.