

COMMENTS FROM THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAUCUS

Twenty years after the adoption of Beijing, this version of the Political Declaration is not what women need.

There has been tremendous progress toward gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls. However, many of the gains that women and girls have made are under threat and women and girls worldwide face extraordinary and unprecedented challenges, including economic inequality, climate change and ocean acidification, and rising, violent fundamentalisms. At a time when urgent action is needed to fully realize gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls, we need renewed commitment, a heightened level of ambition, real resources, and accountability. This Political Declaration, instead, represents a bland reaffirmation of existing commitments that fails to match the level of ambition in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in fact threatens a major step backward.

As women's organizations and feminist organizations, we demand a Political Declaration that:

- **Expresses unequivocal commitments toward fully realizing gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls.** The term “realize gender equality, empowerment and the human rights of women and girls” is used throughout the political declaration. The goal of ensuring the full enjoyment by women and girls of all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms is cross-cutting and emphasized throughout the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, not just in one chapter. In the Beijing Declaration alone, the goal of realizing the human rights of women and girls is affirmed in paragraphs 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 23, 31, 32. Furthermore, the Platform for Action explicitly recognizes that gender equality is a matter of human rights (para 1) and in paragraph 2 states “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.” **Governments cannot pick and choose when to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and should not do so in this declaration.**
- **Commits to accelerated implementation** of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, along with the outcomes of the 23rd United Nations General Assembly Special Session, the Beijing+10 and Beijing+15 political declarations, the agreed conclusions and resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as regional-level declarations on gender equality and the human rights of women and girls.
- **Commits to universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and regional-level treaties** on the human rights of women and girls and gender equality.
- **Recognizes the critical and unequivocal role women's organizations, feminist organizations and women human rights defenders** have played in pushing for gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls. Without feminist organizations, there would be no Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, nor progress in its implementation. Progress has occurred not because of the benevolence of governments, but because feminist organizations and women human rights defenders have fought for it, every step of the way. The attempt of governments to marginalize the role of feminist organizations these groups is an affront to women, everywhere.
- **Commits to create an enabling environment and resources** to allow women's organizations, feminist organizations and women human rights defenders to be able to do their work free from violence.

- **Recognizes and commits to address the emerging challenges** that are setting back our fight for equality and the realization of the human rights of all women and girls. These include increasing fundamentalisms, violent extremism, increased number of displaced persons, increasing inequalities within and between countries, and climate change and ocean acidification, among others. The evidence is clear: women and girls suffer the disproportionate impact of these challenges and without real commitment to address them, gender equality and the full realization of the human rights of women and girls is a pipe dream.
- **Ensures real accountability for governments** including detailed measures to reform and strengthen public institutions to address the structural causes of gender inequality; ensuring an enabling economic environment for women's rights and gender equality beyond sector-specific financing and gender-responsive budgeting; creating national, regional and international systems that hold State and non-State actors, including multilateral institutions, to account for their role in perpetuating gender inequality and violations of the human rights of women and girls; and affirming the principle of international solidarity as the basis for international partnership between States for just, sustainable and equitable development.
- **Affirms the strong linkages between Beijing, Post-2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals.** Realizing gender equality, empowerment and the human rights of women and girls will be critical for the success of the post-2015 development agenda. The Political Declaration should state unequivocal support for the stand-alone gender equality goal and targets as defined by the Open Working Group; recognize the centrality of gender equality, empowerment and human rights of women and girls for sustainable development; Commit to fully implementing the SDG on gender equality and women's empowerment and ensuring a gender and human rights perspective throughout the post-2015 development agenda; and commit to gender-sensitive targets and indicators and ensure that gender is integrated into the means of implementation, financing and mechanisms for review, monitoring and accountability.
- **Recognizes the links between the human rights of women and girls and development.** The Political Declaration must reaffirm the links between the human rights of women and girls and development, particularly as women and girls disproportionately are affected by the consequences of under-development. None of the three pillars of sustainable development - economic, social or environmental - can be achieved without the full participation of women and girls and without all of their human rights being fulfilled. When 61 million children, more than half of them girls, have no access to education, when 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence, and when 1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married by 18, there is a clear failure of development and a serious denial of human rights.

Anything less than the above would be a political failure, at a time when significantly more effort is needed to achieve the goals of fully realizing gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of all women and girls everywhere.