



# Earth Negotiations Bulletin

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## SUMMARY OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: 4-15 SEPTEMBER 1995

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) met in Beijing, China, from 4 to 15 September 1995. Delegates discussed and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They also heard Plenary statements and commitments from member States regarding the actions they would take to promote equality, development and peace for and with the women of the world.

Four official negotiating groups, two Working Groups and two Contact Groups, were formed at the FWCW, as were numerous informal groups, to reach agreement on the draft Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration. Work progressed at a slow but steady pace throughout the negotiations. Night and weekend sessions were necessary to provide adequate time for consultation, and agreement was reached on all but three of the outstanding issues by Thursday, 14 September. Two of the outstanding issues — a footnote reference to implementation in accordance with religious and cultural values and references to non-discrimination based on “sexual orientation” — were decided by rulings from the Chair during a late night session of the Main Committee on 14 September.

Delegates to one of the largest UN conferences ever held emerged from the FWCW with a 38-paragraph Declaration and 345-paragraph Platform. Several dozen countries made reservations, but all nations joined the consensus to adopt and implement most, if not all, of the document, which calls for action to achieve equality, development and peace.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONFERENCE

In resolution 45/129, the UN General Assembly endorsed resolution 1990/12 of the Economic and Social Council, which called for a world conference on women to be held in 1995 and requested that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) serve as the preparatory committee for the conference. In section III of resolution 37/7, the CSW requested that the Secretary-General prepare a draft Platform for Action for its 38th session. Following that meeting, the CSW requested, in resolution 38/10, that the Secretary-General further develop the draft Platform, taking into account the results of regional group meetings.

### REGIONAL GROUP MEETINGS

The regional group meetings were organized by the UN Economic Commissions. The High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was held in Vienna from 17-21 October 1994. The Sixth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin American and the Caribbean met in Mar del Plata, Argentina, from 20-25 September 1994, where the region's Platform for Action was discussed. The Platform was finalized at a 16-18 November 1994 meeting in Chile. The Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Women in Development was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 7-14 June 1994. The Fifth African Regional Conference on Women was held in Dakar, Senegal, from 16-23 November 1994. The Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting was held in Amman, Jordan, from 9-10 November 1994. Each meeting adopted a regional platform, identifying specific problems faced by women in that region.

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This issue of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* © <enb@igc.apc.org> is written and edited by Peter Doran <foeireland@toppsi.gn.apc.org>, Virginia Hulme, Lynn Wagner <grund@usc.edu>, Yang Wanhua <whyang@iisdpost.iisd.ca> and Steve Wise <swise@vps.com>. French translation by Mongi Gadhoum <gad@Tunisia.EU.net>. The managing editor is Langston James Goree VI “Kimo” <kimo@pipeline.com>. The sustaining donors of the *Bulletin* are the International Institute for Sustainable Development <iisd@web.apc.org>, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Pew Charitable Trusts through the Pew Global Stewardship Initiative. General support for the *Bulletin* during 1995 is provided by the United Kingdom, Switzerland, GTZ and the World Bank. Partial funding for this volume of the *Bulletin* has been provided by the Ford Foundation, CIDA, Denmark, UNFPA, the Rockefeller Foundation and UNIFEM. The authors can be contacted at their electronic mail addresses and by phone and fax at +1-212-888-2737. IISD can be contacted at 161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0Y4, Canada; tel: +1-204-958-7700; fax: +1-204-958-7710. The opinions expressed in *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD and other funders. Excerpts from the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* may be used in other publications with appropriate citation. Electronic versions of the *Bulletin* can be found on the gopher at <gopher.igc.apc.org> and in searchable hypertext through the *Linkages* WWW-server at <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/> on the Internet. This volume of the *Bulletin* is uploaded into the APC conferences <enb.library> and <women.news>.

## EXPERT GROUP MEETINGS

The Expert Group meetings focused on the subjects of: gender, education and training; women and economic decision-making; institutional and financial arrangements for the implementation of the FWCW's Platform for Action; and gender and the Agenda for Peace. The Expert Group meeting on the promotion of literacy, education and training, including technological skills, took place at the ILO International Training Center in Turin, Italy, from 10-14 October 1994. The Expert Groups on women and economic decision-making, institutional and financial arrangements, and peace and women in international decision-making took place in New York from 7-11 November 1994, 21-23 November 1994, and 5-9 December 1994, respectively.

## THE 39th SESSION OF THE CSW

The 39th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the preparatory committee for the FWCW, held its third and final preparatory session at UN Headquarters in New York from 15 March to 7 April 1995. This session presented the first opportunity for delegates to examine and negotiate the draft Platform for Action. Due to the number of amendments to the draft Platform and the lack of agreement on numerous issues, negotiations moved to informal sessions early in the meeting and delegates agreed to extend the CSW by three days in order to complete examination of the draft Platform.

The draft Platform, as adopted during the CSW (A/CONF.177/L.1), consisted of six chapters: the mission statement; the global framework; critical areas of concern; strategic objectives and actions; institutional arrangements; and financial arrangements. The twelve critical areas of concern, which are the focus of the Platform, relate to: women in poverty; education; health care; violence against women; effects of conflict on women; power-sharing and decision-making; mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; human rights; mass media; women's management of natural resources and the environment; and the girl child. The section on the girl child was added during the CSW, as proposed by the African Group. In addition, a draft Declaration was drawn up by the G-77/China for negotiation and adoption at the FWCW.

Two key debates marked the session. A small group of delegations objected to some sections of the draft that reaffirmed commitments adopted at previous UN conferences, notably the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. Secondly, a number of delegations objected to the use of the term "gender" in the Platform and proposed that it be bracketed throughout the text. A Contact Group was set up to report on this question to the FWCW.

Mindful of modest resource commitments and with a view to pressing for an action-oriented Conference in Beijing, the meeting also focused on two initiatives: an Australian call for a "Conference of Commitments," and a proposal to install an ombudswoman in the office of the Secretary-General. At the close of the CSW, 40 percent of the draft Platform remained in brackets.

## INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

Due to the large number of outstanding issues in the draft Platform for Action, ECOSOC mandated an additional week of informal consultations, which were held from 31 July to 4 August 1995, at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates established the ground rule that agreements made in New York would be respected in Beijing. Delegates used two working groups to address disputed text by issue area, aided by an informal note prepared by the Secretariat that grouped bracketed text into issue "clusters." Working Group I, chaired by Patricia Licuanan (Philippines), addressed issues related to the macro-economic framework,

resources and institutional framework. Working Group II, chaired by Irene Freudenschuss (Austria), addressed issues related to human rights and diversity. Progress was made in removing brackets from references to a number of economic and human rights issues, including structural adjustment programmes, sustainable development, international human rights instruments and economic rights. Other issues, such as references to the concepts of equity/equitable, proved more difficult and remained bracketed. All issues related to health were held over for discussion in Beijing. The product of the informal consultations (A/CONF.177/L.3), which noted all text successfully negotiated during the informal consultations and reduced the bracketed text by one-third, was transmitted to the FWCW and adopted at its opening session.

## REPORT OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The Fourth World Conference on Women held its opening session Monday afternoon, 4 September, in the Beijing International Conference Centre (BICC). Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ismat Kittani, on behalf of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who was too ill to attend, opened the Conference. He noted that the Conference cements a new era in relations between the UN and China. He identified a number of stages over the past 50 years in the UN's work to ensure the rights of women, which began with efforts to build a legal basis for equality, then recognized the importance of development in achieving the advancement of women, and has led to the current continuum of world conferences and efforts to define a new global agenda.

Chen Muhua, Vice Chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (PRC), was then elected President of the Conference. She invited participants to seek a common ground and a solid commitment in Beijing, which would translate into action. She then opened consideration of the agenda and called delegates' attention to the recommendations of the pre-conference consultations (A/CONF.177/L.4).

Delegates proceeded to adopt the rules of procedure (A/CONF.177/2) and the agenda (A/CONF.177/1). Under the agenda item regarding election of officers other than President, delegates elected: Li Zhaoxing, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the PRC, as Vice President *ex officio*; Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (Namibia), as Rapporteur-General; and Patricia Licuanan (Philippines) as Chair of the Main Committee. In addition, the Vice Chairs were elected, the Main Committee was established and the members of the Credentials Committee were appointed.

Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Conference, stressed the need to look at women's issues holistically. Delegates should consider the cross-cutting nature of women's issues and the fact that women fare poorly when compared to men in many areas, including poverty, literacy, education, health, economic concerns, politics and human rights.

The Plenary then began to hear statements under Agenda Item 8, General Exchange of Views. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, stressed that social prejudices, not religion, deny women their rightful place in many societies. Some of Pakistan's initiatives to improve the status of women include: a public awareness campaign to alert women to the fact that domestic violence is a crime punishable by law; a focus on education for girls; and the establishment of a women's bank to help women achieve financial independence. She noted a number of issues that should be addressed in the Platform, and called for stronger text on the role of the traditional family.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, President of Iceland, called for a Platform containing concrete proposals and political will from governments.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia, highlighted three factors that are crucial to the advancement of women: recognition of women's participation in eradicating poverty and charting a sustainable and peaceful future; affirmation of a new relationship between men and women; and awareness of the role of women.

The Vice-President and Minister of Gender and Community Development in Uganda, Dr. Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, said new global responsibilities for individuals and States have been defined and re-defined, with women playing an increasing role in these debates. She called for new resources to improve functional literacy in the developing world.

The Vice-President of Viet Nam, Nguyen Thi Binh, said the final world gathering of women in the 20th century should chart a course to a more peaceful and prosperous world. She noted the catalytic and exponential value of education, especially for girls, and called on the international community to support the universal right to education.

## CONFERENCE OF COMMITMENTS

Paragraph 293 of the Platform for Action states that governments are primarily responsible for the implementation of the Platform for Action and calls for commitments by governments and the international community. Responding to this paragraph, and to a campaign led by Australia and NGOs, numerous governments pledged during their Plenary statements to dedicate activities and resources to the goals of the FWCW. The following is a sampling of commitments announced, as compiled by a group of NGOs. (The entire commitments list is available on the Internet at <<http://www.igc.apc.org/womensnet/beijing/com1.html>>).

**Australia:** Working women's centers in all states, Task Force on women and communication technologies, and address health inequalities for indigenous women. **Austria:** nationwide women's counseling centers, enact law against family violence, and extension of the constitution to include equality and affirmative action for women. **Belize:** include unremunerated contributions of women in the GDP, and develop laws to protect women from sexual harassment. **Cambodia:** gender parity in peace negotiations and conflict resolution, and elimination of discriminatory economic laws.

**Central African Republic:** create network of women ministers and parliamentarians for follow-up. **Chile:** implement equality policies with an equal opportunities plan. **Côte d'Ivoire:** create a development fund and women's bank for women's agriculture and business, and 100% of girls enrolled in schools by 2000.

**Cyprus:** strengthen national women's rights machinery. **Denmark:** continue 1% of GNP development assistance commitment focusing on poverty elimination and emphasizing women's roles. **Equatorial Guinea:** laws to protect women in marital separation, widowhood, inheritance, family planning, forced marriage and childlessness. **Estonia:** implement the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and establish the legal basis for equal salary conditions.

**Fiji:** 50% participation of women in representation, training, appointments and promotions at all levels of government, and additional resources for women's self-employment through expanded government credit. **Finland:** comprehensive plan for preventing and eliminating violence against women, healing victims and rehabilitating offenders. **Germany:** \$10 million per year for four years for legal and socio-political counseling in developing countries focusing on women, and a national follow-up

conference. **Ghana:** legislation to protect women's property rights, and adult literacy classes for women.

**Iceland:** prioritized and direct measures to implement legislation to improve the status of women. **India:** increase education investment to 6% of GDP with focus on women and girls, and set up a commissioner for women's rights. **Ireland:** mainstream gender in increasing ODA. **Italy:** incorporate gender policies into activities funded by public development aid.

**Jamaica:** prioritized poverty alleviation in the national agenda, and ensure women's equality and full participation in all aspects of national life. **Japan:** pursue Initiative on Women in Development regarding educational standards, health and social participation, and strengthen Asian Women's Fund to combat violence against women. **Kenya:** improve quality of women's and girls' education. **Democratic People's Republic of Korea:** consolidate and follow up successes already achieved.

**Latvia:** appoint official to monitor adherence to CEDAW, and amend labor codes related to childcare, welfare for mothers and other areas. **Lebanon:** increase women in decision making to minimum of 30% and women wood plot owners around homesteads to 90% by 2000. **Lesotho:** remove restrictions on women's ability to obtain credit and do business, and incorporate gender issues into the school curriculum. **Liechtenstein:** promote NGO work on women's equality, and eliminate discriminatory legislation concerning citizenship.

**Luxembourg:** open a center for young women victims of violence or sexual abuse, and increase ODA to 0.7% of GDP by 2000. **Mongolia:** reduce maternal mortality by 50% and infant mortality by 33% from 1990 levels by 2000, and convene national assembly on women's development in 1996 to formulate a national implementation strategy for the Platform for Action. **Mauritania:** adopt a strategy to combat women's poverty. **Mozambique:** permanent support for implementation of projects and programmes towards women's development.

**Nepal:** develop legislation giving women equal rights related to ancestral property laws, implement a programme for universal literacy and a reduced dropout rate in the next five years. **Nigeria:** consider establishing a university for women, consider establishing an insurance scheme for women experiencing divorce, widowhood and other unforeseen circumstances. **Norway:** realize a genderized 20/20 contract as defined at the Social Summit, and commit to the entire Platform for Action. **Philippines:** increase annual contribution to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and allocate a portion of government annual budget to women-specific and gender oriented programmes.

**Poland:** fight women's unemployment, and provide equal access to managerial positions. **Singapore:** offer home economics courses to both male and female students, and encourage employers to support family life programmes at the workplace. **Swaziland:** accelerate implementation of Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies. **St. Lucia:** encourage and involve women in government decision making.

**South Africa:** ratify CEDAW, and increase provision of shelters for battered women. **Suriname:** minimize negative effects of economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) on women and other vulnerable groups. **Tanzania:** set goals in enrollment, completion, illiteracy reduction and gender disparities in education, and revise all discriminatory laws and enact non-discriminatory ones. **Thailand:** develop a plan of action to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform, and integrate women and social development into the eighth national economic and social development plan.

**Turkey:** remove legislative provisions against gender equality, and increase women's literacy by 2% by 2000. **UK:** make an effort to integrate gender into policies and programmes, increase

childcare by 20% (50,000 places) by March 1996. **US:** establish a White House Council on Women to implement the Platform and a six-year \$1.5 billion initiative to fight domestic violence and other crimes against women. **Venezuela:** plan and execute programmes to address and eliminate causes of violence, and guarantee women's equal opportunity in science, technology and culture. **Zambia:** increase women's access to credit, and achieve parity in girls and boys school enrollment by 2005. **Holy See:** focus Catholic social welfare institutions on literacy, education, health and nutrition.

## THE MAIN COMMITTEE

The Main Committee of the FWCW held its first meeting on Tuesday, 5 September, to elect officers and adopt its programme of work for negotiations. Two Working Groups were established, which were chaired by Nana Amma Yeboaa (Ghana) and Irene Freudenschuss (Austria).

Working Group I addressed Chapters I (Mission Statement), II (Global Framework), III (Critical Areas of Concern), V (Institutional Arrangements), VI (Financial Arrangements), and Sections C (Health), J (Mass Media) and L (The Girl Child) of Chapter IV (Strategic Objectives and Actions). Following its first day of discussion on the health section, Working Group I formed a Contact Group, chaired by Mervat Tallawy (Egypt), to consider that text. The Contact Group met throughout the first week and weekend, and had removed all brackets by Tuesday, 12 September. Numerous informal groups were required to facilitate drafting for both groups.

Working Group II considered all of the remaining sections in Chapter IV and the Beijing Declaration. After a first reading of the draft Declaration on Wednesday, 6 September, the Working Group formed a Contact Group, chaired by Olga Pellicer (Mexico), to continue consideration of the text. Negotiations on the Declaration continued until the evening of Thursday, 14 September. Numerous informal groups and weekend sessions were also used by these two working groups. An informal group chaired by Patricia Licuanan was formed to consider bracketed titles throughout the text.

During the last week a high-level group was formed. It was originally intended to consist of a small number of delegates to address procedural questions, but the group expanded to include heads of many delegations and other representatives, and took on some of the most intractable issues in the Declaration, including sexual rights, on Thursday, 14 September, the final day of negotiations.

## BEIJING DECLARATION

The Beijing Declaration changed substantially from the opening to the conclusion of the FWCW. The negotiating process deliberately linked sections of the Declaration to negotiations on similar segments of the Platform for Action. As a result, delegates created a relatively lengthy and dense document that highlights and repeats key parts of the Platform, avoids some of the most controversial elements and adds a broad statement on human rights.

Negotiations on the Declaration were assigned early on to a Contact Group under Olga Pellicer (Mexico). Four difficult paragraphs were eventually passed to the Main Committee in brackets. Those were handled in the high-level group that negotiated remaining disputes during the Conference's final day.

The Contact Group agreed to use a G-77/China draft from 13 June as the basis for negotiations. A revised version of the G-77/China draft was circulated early in the negotiations, incorporating some proposed amendments from the EU, the US, Switzerland, Australia and others. The draft, as well as the final Declaration, was written in four sections: a preamble; reaffirmed commitments; principles under the heading "We are convinced

that;" and actions that governments are determined to carry out. While the original G-77/China proposal comprised 16 paragraphs, the final version contained 38.

The Declaration recognizes that the status of women has advanced but that inequalities and obstacles remain. It reaffirms commitments to: equal rights in a number of existing agreements; ensuring full implementation of human rights of women and the girl child; and empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. Delegates stated their conviction that: women's empowerment and full participation are fundamental to equality, development and peace; equal rights and responsibilities are critical to families; women's involvement is required to eradicate poverty; peace is linked to the advancement of women; and gender-sensitive policies are essential to foster women's empowerment and advancement. Governments are determined to: intensify efforts to achieve goals from the Nairobi strategies; ensure the full enjoyment by women and the girl child of human rights; eliminate discrimination and remove obstacles to equality; encourage men to participate in actions towards equality; promote women's economic independence; promote sustainable development and education; prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls; ensure full participation; and ensure equal access to economic resources.

Delegates agreed quickly on most of the preamble, adding references to the goals of equality, development and peace and women's voices and diversity. Reaffirmation of past agreements and the Nairobi Strategies were accepted, as were endorsements of the human rights of women and the girl child.

The statement that "women's rights are human rights" was adopted in paragraph 14 of the Declaration, despite the objections of some delegations that it could be interpreted as establishing as human rights activities not already covered in international legal instruments. Delegates added a paragraph inserting the "Conference of Commitments" language into the Declaration, that through their commitments at the Conference and elsewhere, Governments and the international community recognize the need for action.

Language was adopted in paragraph 32 (barriers to women's human rights) following an agreement reached on similar text in paragraph 48 of the Platform. Paragraph 28 of the Declaration (nuclear arms, disarmament and a nuclear test ban treaty) was also included after Platform language was agreed.

The Contact Group settled only one of the most contentious paragraphs of the Declaration. Delegates maintained an early agreement to include language from Working Group II on the right of all women to control all aspects of their own health, in particular their fertility. The issue was debated repeatedly, but the language was not altered after initial amendments by the Contact Group.

Four paragraphs were sent out of the Contact Group in brackets: 23 (full enjoyment of human rights); 30 (access to education and health care); 35 (access to economic resources); and 36 (financial resources). The final negotiations on these paragraphs were conducted in the high-level group and approved by the Main Committee. In paragraph 23, the Declaration refers to all human rights and fundamental freedoms, but a reference to sexual and reproductive rights was removed. The final version of paragraph 30 refers to ensuring equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhancing women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education. A specific list of terms was added to paragraph 35, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communications and markets. The financial resources language in paragraph 36 repeats paragraph 6 of the Platform. Paragraph 37 (countries with economies in transition) was added by the Main Committee after the high-level group negotiations.

## PLATFORM FOR ACTION

**CHAPTER I (Mission Statement):** The Mission Statement notes that the Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment, reaffirms the human rights of women and the girl child, and calls for strong commitments. As part of the package of agreements on references to human rights, delegates agreed to unbracket paragraph 2, which reaffirms that the human rights of women and the girl child are part of universal human rights. Subsequent references to "universal" human rights, advocated by the Holy See during the CSW, were deleted. During final adoption of Chapter I in the Main Committee, the G-77/China noted that the Chapter did not adequately reference development and peace, two of the three themes of the Conference. The Main Committee agreed to add a new paragraph 5, which recognizes the necessity of broad-based and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development for social development and justice.

Paragraph 6 (resources) generated considerable debate throughout the drafting process. The G-77/China called for new and additional resources, stressing their importance for implementation. The EU and others stressed adequate resources, national commitments and rearranged priorities. An informal group negotiating several paragraphs on resources drafted the final formulation, calling for the adequate mobilization of resources at the national and international levels, and new and additional resources from all available funding mechanisms.

**CHAPTER II (Global Framework):** The Global Framework describes the international condition in twenty-six paragraphs. It includes references to: past UN conferences; changes since the end of the Cold War; the movement towards democratization; the growing strength of NGOs; women and family; women and religion; and barriers facing women.

Paragraph 9 (implementation in conformity with cultural and religious backgrounds) was among the last paragraphs to be resolved at the Conference. Originally proposed by Iran, the compromise text drafted by an informal group folded in elements from a proposed footnote to Section C (health) that implementation would bear in mind the different cultural and religious differences that exist in countries. Chair Licuanan ruled that the footnote in paragraph 9 would stand, but that it would be deleted in Section C.

A paragraph regarding excessive military expenditures, debt and structural adjustment was opposed by the EU, but emerged from the informal group on resource questions in much the same form as originally drafted. Two other compromises were made on the paragraphs regarding women and family and women and religion. The paragraphs were proposed by the Holy See during the CSW, and came to Beijing entirely in brackets. The final paragraph, negotiated in an informal group, notes that women play a critical role in the family and that various forms of the family exist in different cultural, political and social systems. The final text on religion notes that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is inalienable and that religion and belief may, and can, contribute to fulfilling moral and ethical needs and to realizing one's full potential.

**CHAPTER III (Critical Areas of Concern):** Paragraph 43 of this Chapter reaffirms that the "advancement of women and the achievement of equality" are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice. The Chapter also identifies political, economic and ecological crises along with war and terrorism among the impediments encountered by women since the World Conference in Nairobi. Governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector are called upon to address the interrelated areas of: poverty; unequal access to education and training; inequalities in health care; violence against women and the girl child; effects of conflict; participation in the definition of economic structures and policies; power sharing; mechanisms to

promote advancement of women; human rights of women; the media; the environment; and persistent discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child.

**CHAPTER IV (Strategic Objectives and Actions):** The introduction to this Chapter contains two paragraphs. The first introduces the twelve sections that diagnose the critical areas of concern and propose concrete actions. The second "diversity" paragraph recognizes that many women face particular barriers because of a certain group they belong to, based on race, age or culture.

The debate over "sexual orientation" concentrated on the bracketed reference in this paragraph. During the final Main Committee session, the debate moved out of an informal group and revealed two main positions. Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and others supported the reference, stating that discrimination on any grounds should be prohibited. Egypt, Iran and others opposed the reference, stating it would contradict their religious and cultural values and noted that no international precedent exists for using the term. Chair Licuanan ruled that since the term had not been aired in the UN before and given the strong opposition, the term should not appear in the text.

**Section A (Poverty):** This Section describes the feminization of poverty and its causes, including the lack of women's participation in decision-making and economic structures, migration and changes in family structure, limited access to education, support services, training and resources and rigidity of socially ascribed gender roles. The actions States and other actors are called on to take include: ensure food security; strengthen social safety nets; support female-headed households and anti-poverty programmes; recognize women migrants' human rights; ensure access to financial services; use gender perspectives in economic policy making; examine the relationship between unremunerated work and poverty; provide new and additional financial resources to target women living in poverty; and integrate a gender perspective into lending programmes, including structural adjustment programmes.

Delegates debated whether to distinguish between documented and non-documented migrant workers in paragraph 60(1). The G-77/China preferred the reference to both while the EU and others preferred only a reference to documented migrants. The final paragraph refers to ensuring the full realization of the human rights of all women migrants, including women migrant workers, and also calls for empowerment of documented women migrants, including migrant workers.

A paragraph regarding inheritance was contested by many Islamic States, but was deleted once a similar paragraph was agreed to in the section on the girl child.

**Section B (Education):** This section notes that many children, especially girls, do not have access to primary education. More than two-thirds of adult illiterates are women. An environment where girls and boys are treated equally and where non-stereotyped images of women and men are promoted would help eliminate causes of discrimination and inequality. Actors are called on to: eliminate discrimination in education; ensure universal access to and completion of primary education; increase enrollment and retention rates of girls; eliminate barriers to the schooling of young mothers and pregnant girls; eradicate illiteracy among women; promote equal sharing of family responsibilities by girls and boys; remove barriers to sexual and reproductive health education; educate rural women; and ensure sufficient resources for educational reforms and monitoring implementation.

Points of discussion in this section included paragraphs that reference religious, moral and spiritual values (74), sexual and reproductive education (76), the parents' ability to choose education for the girl child (82(f)), freedom of conscience and

religion in educational institutions (82(f)), and the expansion of the definition of literacy (83(f)). All these references are included in the final document, but delegates agreed to “work towards an expansion of the definition of literacy.”

**Section C (Health):** This section contained almost a quarter of the unresolved text held over from the CSW. The theme of the text is “the human rights of women...to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” (97). In this and other related paragraphs, including paragraph 95 (discriminatory and harmful practices), divisions in opinion were determined largely by religious/secular views on the permissibility of sexual relations outside marriage and attitudes toward contraception and abortion. A proposed footnote qualifying government commitment to implementation with references to sovereignty and respect for religious and cultural values was dropped from this Section, but the reference remains in paragraph 9.

A commitment to “consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions” was retained after the addition of a reference to paragraph 8.25 of the ICPD Programme of Action, which notes that abortion should not be promoted as a method of family planning. References to the “integrity of the body” previously used in the ICPD Programme of Action and the Report of the 1975 Women’s Conference in Mexico were amended to refer to “integrity of the person” in paragraphs 97 and 108(d). Language on parental rights and duties balanced the right of adolescent girls to privacy and counseling (e.g. reporting sexual abuse involving family members) with the rights and duties of parents, but notes that the primary consideration is the best interest of the child. References to “race and ethnicity” (105, 110(a), and 111(d)) were replaced by references to demographic factors after delegations expressed fears about racial discrimination. Disagreements over reference to the ICPD were resolved in a formula referring to the commitments contained in the Programme of Action in the report of the Conference. The section also reaffirms the ICPD goal of universal access to health services by the year 2015, addresses gender sensitive programmes on HIV/AIDs and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and shared responsibility between men and women in matters related to sexual and reproductive behavior.

**Section D (Violence against women):** In this Section, delegates resolved that in “all” societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Among the types of abuse that are identified are acts of violence in situations of armed conflict (115) and forced sterilization, abortion and forced use of contraceptives, prenatal sex selection and female infanticide (115 *bis*).

Delegates identified as particularly vulnerable displaced women, repatriated women, migrant workers, women living in poverty, and those living under conditions of foreign occupation, wars of aggression, civil wars, and terrorism, including hostage taking (116). Delegates noted the adverse impact of images in the media in paragraph 119. A reference to “unwanted pregnancy” is included in paragraph 123, calling for implementation and strengthening of the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and other relevant instruments. The term “female foeticide” was deleted from paragraph 125(i), which calls for legislation against female genital mutilation, prenatal sex selection, infanticide and dowry-related violence.

**Section E (Armed conflict):** This Section links peace with development and equality between men and women. It also sets forth the human rights abuses that often accompany armed conflict and notes their disproportionate effect on women. Actors should:

increase women’s participation in conflict resolution and leadership; train officials dealing with cases of violence against women in situations of armed conflict; convert military industries to peaceful purposes; recognize effects of excessive military expenditures and the need to combat trafficking in drugs, arms, women and children; establish moratoria on anti-personnel land-mines and assistance in mine clearing; ratify international instruments on the protection of women and children in armed conflicts; recognize that rape is a war crime; and protect, assist and train refugee and displaced women.

Delegates debated the references to foreign occupation and alien domination (paragraphs 132, 136, 144(c), and 144(d)). The G-77/China preferred to keep the language, but others wanted it deleted. An informal group formulated a reference that was used throughout the document. Malta objected to the reference to forced pregnancy (132), which was only retained in paragraph 136 (consequences of armed conflict). An informal group expanded the language on land mines (145(e)) to five sub-paragraphs that call for: working towards ratification of international instruments prohibiting or restricting the use of land mines; consider strengthening the 1981 Convention on Prohibitions and Restrictions on Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects; promoting assistance in mine clearance; support for efforts to coordinate a common response programme of assistance in demining; adoption of a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land-mines; and solutions for problems caused by land mines.

In paragraph 149(1), Canada, the EU and US wanted to delete reference to increasing funds for refugee programmes, but the G-77/China objected. The final version calls for recognition of the effects of large numbers of refugees on host countries and the need to share this burden.

**Section F (Inequality in women’s access to and participation in the definition of economic structures):** This Section notes that there are differences in women’s and men’s access and opportunities to exert power over economic structures and their societies. Discrimination in education and training, hiring and remuneration, restricted employment and other professional opportunities for women. Actors are called on to promote women’s self-reliance, facilitate women’s equal access to resources, and create a flexible work environment.

An informal negotiating group revised paragraph 158 on women’s unremunerated work, noting that it is both undervalued and under-recorded and, in the case of domestic work, is often not measured at all in quantitative terms. The contribution of women to development is therefore “seriously underestimated and thus its social recognition is limited” contributing to a lack of sharing of responsibilities. The issue is also addressed in paragraph 167(g). Brackets were lifted from paragraph 159, which addresses the exacerbation of inequalities between men and women as a result of economic globalization. New Zealand introduced a specific reference to the creation of pressures on the employment situation of women to adjust to new circumstances. Recognition of labor sectors where women predominate and measures to enhance access to male dominated sectors are addressed in paragraph 162. The US redrafted paragraph 156 to note the contribution of migrant workers. Funders are called upon to develop strategies to consolidate assistance to micro, small and medium-scale enterprises in paragraph 171(c). In paragraph 181, governments are called on to use labor laws to: protect part-time, temporary, seasonal and home-based workers; ensure that full-time and part-time work can be freely chosen by women and men on an equal basis; and support opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and benefits. The promotion of equal sharing of responsibilities is also addressed in this Section.

**Section G (Decision-making):** This Section notes that women's equal participation in decision-making and political life plays a pivotal role in the advancement of women. Women are under-represented at most levels of government and in decision-making positions in most other fields. Socialization and negative stereotyping have kept decision-making in the domain of men. Women have gained access to power through alternative structures such as NGOs. Actors are called on to: create a gender balance in government and administration; integrate women into political parties; recognize that shared work and parental responsibilities promote women's increased participation in public life; promote gender balance within the UN system; work toward equality between women and men in the private sector; establish equal access for women to training; increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership; and increase women's participation in the electoral process and political activities.

There was some discussion as to whether women's participation strengthens democracy or is a prerequisite for the proper functioning of democracy. The final text says that women's participation in decision making is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its regular functioning. Delegates also discussed whether to set specific targets for women's participation, but agreed to omit them.

**Section H (Insufficient mechanisms):** This Section notes the lack of sufficient mechanisms at national, regional and international levels for the advancement of women. It calls for the creation or strengthening of national machineries, integrating a gender perspective in public policy and generating gender-disaggregated data.

References to data collection and presentation on unremunerated work required extensive negotiations. The EU supported the language used at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, but others supported stronger language. The final agreement reached in an informal group calls for a more comprehensive knowledge of all forms of work by: improving data collection on the unremunerated work that is already included in the UN System of National Accounts; improving measurements; and developing methods for assessing the value of unremunerated work that is outside national accounts, with a view to making visible the unequal distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work between women and men.

**Section I (Human rights):** This Section notes that human rights are the birthright of all human beings. Governments must work actively to promote and protect these rights and the systematic and systemic nature of discrimination against women must be taken into account when international human rights instruments are applied. Lack of awareness is an obstacle that prevents women from fully enjoying their rights. Actors are called on to implement human rights instruments, ensure non-discrimination under the law and achieve legal literacy.

Among the critical issues discussed in Beijing was paragraph 223 (the right to decide number and spacing of children and to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health). Resolution was reached by an informal group working on health issues. Original bracketed references to the World Conference on Human Rights and the ICPD (which did not create any human rights) and the reservations expressed and definitions developed at those conferences, were replaced by noting that the FWCW bears in mind the outcomes of the two conferences.

A reference to sexual and reproductive rights in paragraph 232(f) also generated debate. A number of delegates, including Morocco and Argentina, wanted to delete 232(f), while others, including Namibia and Jamaica, urged retaining the language. Jordan pointed out that in marriage an Islamic woman has sexual

rights. The high-level discussions on Thursday, 14 September, recommended a reformulated text that remains in this Section.

**Section J (Mass media):** This Section notes that the potential exists for the media to make a greater contribution to the advancement of women, however, few women have attained positions at the decision-making level in the communications sector. The continued projection of negative images of women in the media must be changed, and women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. Action is called for to increase participation of women in the media and promote a non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

Delegates called for professional codes of conduct rather than regulatory mechanisms in paragraph 244(a), and agreed to insert "consistent with freedom of expression" in a number of places, at the request of the US. Several countries, including the G-77/China and the EU wanted to delete the reference in paragraph 245(b) (media materials on role models) calling for materials on "caring mothers and nurturers of happy families." Some, including Peru, Guatemala and Pakistan, supported shortening the reference to "mothers." The final text calls for media materials on women as leaders who bring to their positions of leadership many different life experiences, including balancing work and family responsibilities as mothers and as professionals.

**Section K (Women and the environment):** In this Section, delegates called on governments and relevant organizations to ensure full compliance with international obligations relating to the transboundary movement and safe storage of hazardous and radioactive wastes. Governments are also asked to consider action to prohibit movement of those materials that are unsafe and insecure. Paragraph 246 reaffirms the linkage between poverty and environmental degradation, and identifies unsustainable patterns of consumption and production as the major cause of deterioration. The paragraph also notes the special risks toxic chemicals pose to women's health. Noting the lack of recognition and support for women's contribution to conservation, paragraph 252 calls for an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all environmental policies and programmes. In paragraph 253(c), governments are invited to encourage the effective protection and use of "the knowledge, innovations and practices of women of indigenous and local communities," in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity. They are asked to ensure that their application is promoted with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge.

**Section L (The girl child):** This Section notes that fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood and that gender-biased educational processes reinforce existing gender inequalities. The percentage of girls enrolled in secondary school remains low and the girl child's health is endangered by discrimination in her access to nutrition and physical and mental health services. Actions to be taken focus on eliminating all forms of discrimination, especially education, health and nutrition and negative cultural attitudes and practices. Actors are also called to educate the girl child about social, economic and political issues and to strengthen the role of the family in advancing the status of the girl child.

A number of debates revolved around using "family" or "families." The reference appeared in several paragraphs, including 263 (reasons for girls not attending school), 285(a) (policies to help the family) and 285(b) (strengthening the family). Guatemala, Benin and others supported "family," but the EU and others supported "families" or "in its various forms." An informal group proposed reference to "the family, as described in paragraph 30," which notes that, in different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist.

Another significant agreement was reached in paragraph 274(d) (equal right to succession and inheritance). Egypt explained to delegates that Islamic countries could not accept “equal inheritance.” Norway noted that countries with different systems could not accept “equitable” inheritance rights, and suggested using reservations. An informal group negotiated text calling for the elimination of the injustice and obstacles in relation to inheritance faced by the girl child by, *inter alia*, enacting, as appropriate, legislation that ensures the equal right to inherit regardless of sex. A number of Islamic states still reserved on the text, although Iran stated that the text was not contrary to its economic system.

**CHAPTER V (Institutional Arrangements):** This Chapter notes that, while the primary responsibility of States, implementation is dependent on a wide range of institutions at all levels. Changes in the internal dynamics of institutions and organizations and strong mandates for national and regional institutions are also required. Actions are then noted for the national, subregional/regional and international levels. At the international level, actions by the UN system and other international institutions are specified.

Paragraph 293 (conference of commitments) was one of the bracketed paragraphs negotiated in Beijing. Australia had proposed that the FWCW be a “Conference of Commitments,” whereby States would make commitments during Plenary speeches and a list of the commitments would appear in an annex to the report of the Conference. The EU offered an alternative text, which excluded the reporting component. An informal group agreed to note that the FWCW is a conference of commitments, that States and the international community have been encouraged to make commitments for action, and that many have done so in their national statements.

Paragraph 309 (high-level post in the office of the Secretary-General) was also bracketed coming into Beijing. The EU proposed inviting the Secretary-General to consider “designating” a high-level official in his office to advise on gender issues, but many joined Benin’s call for the “creation” of the post. The agreed text, which was moved to paragraph 327, invites the Secretary-General to “establish” the post, using existing human and financial resources.

Paragraphs regarding the CSW, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) were entirely bracketed at the CSW. Delegates drafted language calling for: a strengthened mandate for the CSW with sufficient resources, through reallocation of resources within the regular UN budget; a review by INSTRAW of its work programme to develop a programme for implementing those aspects of the Platform that fall within its mandate; and a review by UNIFEM of its work programme in light of the Platform.

Paragraph 343 (international financial institutions) was resolved in Beijing by the informal group working on resource issues. It encourages international financial institutions to review policies and to increase the number of women in high-level positions. The Bretton Woods and UN institutions are called on to establish substantive dialogues for more effective coordination of their assistance.

**CHAPTER VI (Financial Arrangements):** This Chapter notes that financial and human resources have generally been insufficient for the advancement of women, and notes the necessity of political commitment to make available the human and financial resources. Actions at the national, regional and international levels are specified.

Very few brackets remained in this Chapter after the CSW. Delegates in Beijing agreed that resources from the international community for UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies, in particular UNIFEM and INSTRAW, need to be sufficient and should be maintained at an adequate level.

## FINAL SESSION OF THE MAIN COMMITTEE

The Main Committee held five sessions during the final days of the Conference to adopt texts agreed to in the Working. The results of the Working Groups were presented in a series of “Non-Papers” and corrections to Non-Papers, or updates on new agreements. During its final session, delegates debated unresolved issues regarding references to “sexual orientation” and a footnote to Section C (Health), recognizing the need to implement the Platform in accordance with religious and cultural values. Delegates did not come to a consensus on either issue, so Chair Licuanan ruled that both the footnote in Section C and all references to “sexual orientation” would be deleted.

A number of reservations and interpretive statements were offered following Main Committee adoption. With regard to the reference to commitments in paragraph 293 (conference of commitments), the US said it would not interpret the Platform as legally binding. With regard to Section J (Mass media), the US noted that the Platform proposals constitute recommendations and would not impinge on the freedom of the press. The US also made interpretive statements on paragraphs 19 (radical transformation of the relationship between women and men), 27 (NGOs), 97 (sexual rights) and 168(l) (workers’ rights). The US noted concern with any implication that foreign occupation is a human rights violation *per se*, and indicated that it would submit statements on two paragraphs in the Declaration, paragraph 5 (resources) and Section H (Mechanisms). Nepal made an interpretive statement on 25(*bis*) (freedom of religion).

In Section C (Health), Costa Rica, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Bahrain, Japan and Iran stated their intention to submit interpretive notes. Oman reserved on paragraphs 97 and 107(k) regarding reproductive rights and abortion. Kuwait reserved on paragraphs 95 (discrimination against girls in nutrition and health care), 96 (reproductive health), 97 and 107(k). A number of reservations noted during the Main Committee were repeated in the Plenary.

Syria reserved on paragraph 145(g), concerning the production and marketing of traditional conventional weapons. The Russian Federation made interpretive statements on: paragraphs 258(c) (hazardous and radioactive wastes), saying that his country would interpret this paragraph as applying only to transboundary movement of such wastes; and 193(c) (political agenda), saying that he understood it to mean that political parties themselves determine the introduction of gender issues into their policies.

Canada, New Zealand, Latvia, Israel, Jamaica, South Africa, Norway and the Cook Islands issued interpretive statements on paragraph 48 (diversity), noting that they understand the term “other status” to include discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Slovenia interpreted paragraph 232(f) as including the right to be free from discrimination, violence and coercion on the basis of sexual orientation. The US and EU stated they would submit interpretive statements, noting their policies of non-discrimination. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia reserved on paragraph 6 (resources) because it marginalized countries with economies in transition.

## CLOSING PLENARY

Conference President Chen Muhua opened the Plenary Friday morning, 15 September. Sara Ramamonjisoa, on behalf of the Youth NGOs, presented a statement of Youth Vision, calling on the UN to continue its support for youth participation in its global conferences, and to take measures to ensure access to leadership roles for young women in all spheres.

James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, acknowledged the negative perceptions of World Bank activities, citing structural adjustment programmes, and their negative impact on women. He



came to the FWCW to demonstrate the World Bank's commitment to the issues of the Conference and called for partnership and trust. The World Bank will spend US\$2 billion over five years on education, with US\$900 million dollars a year for education of young girls.

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori spoke of the double burden of poverty on women in Peru and all developing countries. Peru is one of the few countries that has enacted laws against all forms of violence against women. He criticized the Catholic hierarchy in Peru for opposing the country's comprehensive family planning policy, which is addressing a serious lack of information and services.

Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland said women would no longer accept second class citizenship. Views from the FWCW would irrevocably shape the world. In Norway, where Brundtland has been prime minister for fifteen years, four-year-olds sometimes ask their mothers: "But can a man be prime minister?" She said there are limits to the practices that countries can expect the international community to accept or condone even when such practices do have deep cultural roots. Violence against women can be said to be part of a cultural pattern in most countries, including Norway, but States must not become accomplices.

Secretary-General Gertrude Mongella, in a call for peace, said it is important to combine the struggle for equality with the struggle for peace. She invited delegates to observe a few minutes of peace and, holding flashlights that had been distributed, participants stood in silence with her.

Conference President Chen Muhua then invited delegates to consider Agenda Item 10, Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (A/CONF.177/L.5). Patricia Licuanan (Philippines) presented the report of the Main Committee, and noted that the texts capture the gains achieved since Nairobi and the critical concerns that should be addressed. The Philippines, on behalf of the G-77/China, presented draft resolution A/CONF.177/L.9, calling for adoption and recommending that the General Assembly endorse the documents. Delegates adopted the resolution, after which the floor was opened for reservations.

Over 60 delegates took the floor to comment on the Declaration and Platform for Action. The following States noted reservations to text that was not in conformity with Islamic law, including paragraphs 232(f) (reproductive rights), 107(k) (review punitive laws for illegal abortions), 96 (reproductive health), 97 (right to control sexuality) and 274(d) (inheritance): Kuwait, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Brunei, Yemen, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Djibouti, Qatar, Syria, Comoros and Jordan. Many of these States interpreted references to reproductive rights in the context of marriage. Iran expressed concern about all but the references to inheritance, which do not contradict its economic system.

The following States noted they did not condone abortion, and expressed reservations to paragraphs such as 97 (right to control sexuality) and 107(k) (review punitive laws for illegal abortions): the Philippines, Malaysia, Ecuador, Malta, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, Mali, Nicaragua, Togo, Honduras and Niger. Malta also noted that it reserved on references to the use of international human rights instruments. The Holy See indicated that it would submit formal reservations in writing, but expressed regret about the document's exaggerated individualism. Several States, including Malaysia, Peru, Argentina and Nicaragua, noted that they would interpret "family" in a traditional sense of union between man and woman. Indonesia noted that certain paragraphs were not consistent with the national interests of the individual. France stated that paragraph 247 (sustainable development, with a reference to testing nuclear weaponry) did not correspond to its record of the results of the Main Committee.

Several States, including the Dominican Republic, Iraq, Vanuatu and Nigeria, promised to implement the document in conformity with their constitutional and cultural principles. Benin noted that certain paragraphs were not in accordance with its legislation and religious practices, including paragraphs 97 (right to control sexuality), 232(f) (reproductive rights), and 107(k) (review punitive laws for illegal abortions).

Liberia noted that it could implement 90-95% of the Platform for Action. Pakistan objected to the lack of a clear definition of the term "sexuality," and entered a reservation on the term and on paragraphs 232(f) and 97. The Maldives noted that certain terms were not in conformity with the Maldives traditional values, specifically in paragraphs 97 and 107(k).

A number of countries, including India, Bolivia, Colombia, Cambodia, South Africa, Tanzania, Panama, El Salvador, Madagascar and Cameroon, stated that they had no reservations on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Rapporteur-General, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (Namibia), then introduced the draft Report of the Conference (A/CONF.177/L.7 and Addendum 1, parts 1 and 2), which was adopted. France exercised a right of reply, and informed delegates that his delegation had given a response to the Secretariat regarding nuclear testing. The Philippines, on behalf of the G-77, introduced A/CONF.177/L.8, expressing gratitude to the PRC, which was adopted.

The floor was then opened for statements. The Philippines, on behalf of the G-77, expressed gratitude for all who had made the meeting a success. Spain, on behalf of the EU, noted a number of significant areas in the agreements, including human rights, health and sexuality, and unremunerated work. Senegal, on behalf of the African Group, noted that the African States recognize that they are the first and foremost entities responsible for implementing the Platform for Action. They are convinced that their partners in development will stand by them.

Papua New Guinea, on behalf of the Asian Group, recalled Mongella's comment earlier in the Conference that she felt like an expectant mother, and noted that, once the baby is born, the pain of labor is forgotten but the responsibility to nurture and care for the child begins. The Ukraine, on behalf of the Eastern European countries, noted the lack of Russian interpretation and documents, and stressed the need to participate on an equal basis, but noted their pleasure with the work that had been achieved in Beijing. Barbados, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, noted that, although the group was diverse, a spirit of goodwill and compromised prevailed and they will leave Beijing with resolve and determination to implement the Platform for Action. Malta, on behalf of the Western European and Others Group, noted satisfaction with the success achieved through dialogue with governments and NGOs.

Secretary-General Mongella noted the work of delegates, the Secretariat, the Chinese hosts, and the drive and dedication of NGOs. She stated that there is no going back, and that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

Special Representative of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Ismat Kittani, noted that China has hosted one of the largest global conferences ever, and thanked them for being hosts to the world. He stressed that the commitments made in Beijing are not just the result of the FWCW negotiations, but are shaped by the growing influence of the women's movement. He stated that the women's movement has a staunch ally in the UN and asked that the Platform for Action receive wide dissemination.

The US stressed its commitment to women's empowerment, and noted that Nairobi should be thought of as a compass and Beijing as a detailed map for achieving equality, development and peace.

Canada stated that here in Beijing the world's women moved the agenda for global equality forward.

In her closing statement, Conference President Chen Muhua said that the success of the conference demonstrates that governments have a shared political will and determination. She called for effective follow-up measures to turn the commitments into reality.

## A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE CONFERENCE

The significance of and outcomes from the Fourth World Conference on Women will be gauged from a number of perspectives. From each perspective arises a complex set of expectations when a meeting like the FWCW is convened. Criteria for measuring success and failure shift between the actors according to their roles, level of participation, and initial relationship to the agenda. Some focused on the documents that emerged from the FWCW, others on the commitments States made, and still others on the process involved and what it represents in the global agenda for women's equality.

**THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION:** The attainment of a consensus agreement on the Platform for Action, which deals with, identifies, analyzes, and invites action by Governments, was one baseline of success for some participants. While fundamental differences over some of the language in the draft Platform emerged at the 39th Session of the CSW, over the word "gender" for example, the facility for entering reservations to selected portions of the document was always likely to provide dissenters with a mechanism for living with the elements they found disagreeable. The large number of reservations on health and sexuality reflect abiding political and cultural differences that the FWCW exposed and reflected, but could not realistically be expected to resolve. The combination of consensus language and reservations can be viewed as a status report on those issues for women in different parts of the world.

Compared to the exchanges at the 39th Session of the CSW, the atmosphere at the informal consultations in August and in Beijing was more cooperative. Some key players appeared to shift from earlier positions and signaled an early desire to reach agreement. For example, the Holy See gave an early assurance that it did not wish to unravel any existing agreements to counter highly publicized claims that it was seeking to re-open debates from the ICPD. A conference officer suggested that the poor publicity itself might have been a factor, along with negotiating strategy.

Time was a constraint, given the large number of outstanding issues and their content, and forced an acceleration of the negotiating pace that generated some objections. At one stage, the Chair of the informal group discussing the section on health, Mervat Tallawy (Egypt), offered to resign when delegates claimed that she was forcing the agenda. For the most part, work progressed at a slow but steady pace. Long hours were required, but a final agreement was never in serious doubt. As one member of the Secretariat commented on the final day, "This was a Conference that could not fail."

In addition to the baseline objective of a consensus document, many saw this conference as an opportunity to consolidate and reaffirm commitments made at other UN conferences in a single document focused on the role of women. Of particular importance was the integration of the references to gender in each of these prior agreements into the Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration. A common topic in FWCW debates was where the language ranged in relationship to agreements reached in prior conferences. Delegates cited prior language to defend political territory claimed in Vienna, Cairo or Copenhagen and to prevent expansion of their

principles. In fact, the FWCW extended a number of established commitments.

Among the expansions was a call to protect human rights activists working in environments where freedom of assembly and freedom of speech are restricted. Delegates also declared that systematic rape during armed conflict is a war crime and, in some cases, a crime against humanity. They recognized the rights of women to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive health and decision-making. Recognition was made that parental rights and responsibilities must be qualified to ensure that adolescents and children enjoy respect, privacy and access to counseling and other health-related services when required, and that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration. References to how unremunerated work could be measured were expanded. Treatment of some macro-economic issues and their effect on women drew praise from NGOs and developing country delegates and reservations from developed country delegates. Despite these advances in language from other UN conference documents, the FWCW did not make significant strides relative to the UNCED women's agenda. Delegates, NGOs and observers complained that their environmental issues were given relatively little attention in Beijing and that accepted concepts and language were being challenged or ignored.

**CONFERENCE OF COMMITMENTS:** The FWCW became a "Conference of Commitments" thanks to a 1994 Australian proposal, supported by NGOs, to invite participating States to use their Plenary speeches to announce undertakings consistent with the objectives of the Platform for Action. The idea gathered momentum during the 39th Session of the CSW in New York and found a place in the Platform for Action. During negotiations, however, an Australian suggestion that the commitments should be recorded by the Conference Secretariat and included in an annex of the FWCW report was dropped. Opposition to the recording of commitments came from States concerned that specific commitments on a limited number of the "Critical Areas of Concern" in the Platform would detract from the wider agenda. Instead, NGOs monitored the Plenary speeches. In her comments throughout the FWCW its preparatory process, Secretary-General Mongella spoke of the analysis-laden agenda of the women's movement and the need to proceed to action. For leading delegations and NGO representatives, the commitments became the first tangible indicators of substance. For its part, the UN has been invited to consider a high level official at the level of the Secretary-General's office, and to continue and enhance its programme of mainstreaming gender throughout its activities.

For those who have heard enough words and demand action, the "Commitments" proposal provided a push toward implementation; an opportunity not only to monitor but to apply pressure by ensuring that delegations and observers alike would have no doubt about who was doing what, and who wasn't. NGOs found that the proposal also provided a strategic "hook" during pre-Conference regional gatherings, creating a tangible rallying point for new and existing constituencies around the world. One of the NGO organizers responsible for monitoring the Commitments explained that the important thing would be to "bring Beijing home." The Commitments, alongside the Platform and Declaration, will provide national lobbying efforts with additional weight, contributing to NGOs' ability to propose specific examples of initiatives to their governments when they begin to jointly work out national strategies for implementation.

**THE GLOBAL PROCESS:** For many, the global process of the FWCW will be the rich and complex criteria adopted to assess its success. Members of the Secretariat and the NGO community have characterized the process in a number of interesting ways, with many noting the perception of being at the threshold of a "Century of Women." There is a sense that women will not only be

seen to take power but use it to participate in a re-definition of economic, political and social life and re-make peace and development in the image of a more balanced and just humanity. A senior member of the FWCW Secretariat said the UN's world conferences had literally changed women's lives. In Beijing, an Arab women's human rights group had addressed the Plenary, which would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. The process has begun to lift the veil on new ways of thinking. Between Nairobi and Beijing, the women's agenda became a gender agenda. Men's opportunities for different roles as nurturers must also be enhanced.

The transition to a universal agenda was captured in Beijing by the reaffirmation of women's rights as human rights. In Nairobi, the agenda was taken beyond national welfare programmes for women towards the development of global feminist consensus building. The President of the European Women's Lobby, Anne Taylor, said that an evolution has taken place in the women's movement between Nairobi and Beijing, with women around the world "occupying a different space" today. She suggested that objectives are clearer and commitment to implementation of the Platform resolute. Governments have become comfortable with the language but have yet to discover the powerful voice behind it. Some participants are already calling for another world conference in five years time. The proposal is already under active consideration in the CSW and the UN Secretariat.

Within the UN system, the conference will be viewed as the latest stage in a process of supporting and developing a global agenda for women's equality. The FWCW is a product of the UN system's advanced thinking on women's issues, which has contributed to a recognition that gender is an indispensable component of its cross-cutting programme of world conferences on the environment, population, human rights, and social and economic development. For the member States, the UN's conferences on women (Mexico 1975, Nairobi 1985) and agreements (Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979) serve as a powerful mechanism, mediating between the demands of a worldwide network of women's movements in civil society and national legislators. Governments' attitudes toward women's participation and the politics of gender vary immensely, as was witnessed during the FWCW. For the vanguard of the women's movement(s), the UN process has fostered the internationalization of their issues and provided unique opportunities for face-to-face networking, agenda development and mobilization. With an interest in accessing and influencing both the intergovernmental negotiations at the formal FWCW and maintaining their power to mobilize and exchange ideas, NGOs will assess both the formal negotiations and the parallel NGO Forum at Huairou. Through the eyes of the women at Huairou the two conferences express all the essential dimensions of the process. In all, over 50,000 people took part in the two events, the largest UN world gathering.

At the heart of the process of which the FWCW will become a milestone is a process of struggle, learning and consensus building around achievable objectives.

Most delegates attending UN meetings and conferences are obliged to apply themselves to issues, sometimes for the first time. Within the G-77/China this was acknowledged by one of the senior delegates from the Philippines at the 39th Session of the CSW. The

learning process is one of the less tangible outcomes. Nevertheless, those who have followed the process report that issues that were once beyond the pale for some delegations at international fora, including domestic violence and sexual rights, are now firmly on the agenda. Some feel that the FWCW initiated what will be a continuing discussion on new issues, specifically "sexual orientation" in the context of non-discrimination and human rights. Informal discussion on this and issues related to sexual rights were described as open and frank, although positions did not change on the text.

A number of NGOs who are well acquainted with the issues have informed themselves about UN negotiations and are developing professional lobbying techniques and strategies to create one of the most effective branches of global civil society. The gap between those in the know and those accustomed to viewing power at a distance, however, was evident and contributed to tensions among NGOs at the FWCW. Those who prepared well in advance were satisfied with their input and the results of their lobbying. The mechanism adopted to provide daily monitoring and feedback was a representative group called "Equipo." This team coordinated NGO procedural matters with the UN Secretariat. The response from government delegates to NGO efforts varied according to political cultures and the negotiating environment. At the 39th Session of the CSW, Secretary-General Mongella commented that governments had invited their NGO guests into their "living room, but then disappeared into the kitchen and failed to reappear until a late stage in the evening."

A similar process occurred at the FWCW, especially when critical issues were finally decided by the high-level group. The large number of amendments and contentious issues during the first reading of the draft Platform in Beijing necessitated the formation of informal working groups to deal with the detail. This created difficulties for some NGO representatives in terms of monitoring and lobbying. Inevitably, some felt excluded from the decisive exchanges. The UN is currently conducting a review of its procedures for NGO access to its negotiations. The evolving relationship between NGOs and the UN reflects the more global movement in which women are setting their own agenda, taking action and encouraging governments to follow.

## THINGS TO LOOK FOR AFTER BEIJING

**50th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY:** The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be presented to the General Assembly during its 50th session this fall for endorsement.

**40th SESSION OF THE CSW:** The CSW, at its session during the first half of 1996, will evaluate its role in implementing the Platform for Action.

**NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION:** As noted in paragraph 297 of the Platform, States should, as soon as possible and preferably by the end of 1995, begin to develop strategies to implement the Platform. States should have developed their strategies or plans of action preferably by the end of 1996.

**HABITAT II:** The Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3-14 June 1996.