

**OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ADVISER ON
GENDER ISSUES AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
2 UN Plaza, DC-2-1220, New York, NY 10017 USA
Telephone 212-963 5086 - Fax 212-963-1802
Internet location: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>

**Statement
by
Ms. Rachel N. Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and
Advancement of Women**

**at
The UNECE Regional Preparatory Meeting
for the 10-year Review of the Implementation of the
Beijing Platform for Action**

Geneva, 14-15 December 2004

Madame Executive Secretary, distinguished delegates, representatives of civil society and colleagues, thank you for your warm welcome. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 10-year Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action organized by the Economic Commission for Europe. The Commission plays a critical role in promoting the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of the special session of the General Assembly Beijing+5 in the region. I wish, in particular, to commend the personal commitment and support of Ms. Brigita Schmögnerová, Executive Secretary of the Commission to the issue of gender equality. I also wish to highlight the excellent work done by the Gender Team of ECE, particularly, to prepare this Conference and on mainstreaming gender into economic policies.

Your Conference takes place at a critical time in regard to United Nations initiatives for the advancement of women. Member States are now well advanced in their preparations for the ten-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century” (Beijing+5) at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to be held in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005.

Consultations among Member States on preparations, including a plenary high-level event, high-level panels and related interactive events as well as an outcome of the review are progressing. The report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action is being finalized and will be available on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women. This document reflects the responses of 134 Governments to a questionnaire prepared jointly with the five regional commissions on achievements made to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of Beijing+5, obstacles still remaining and future actions to overcome these obstacles. Other arrangements with regard to participation of NGOs, organizational matters and participation of United Nations entities are being discussed as well.

I am delighted that four recent regional preparatory meetings have produced excellent results not only in taking stock of progress achieved in the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action in their regions, but also in making concrete recommendations on what needs to be done to expedite the process of change in order to achieve full gender equality. The regional meetings discussed progress achieved in their respective regions to which the partnerships of the Member States and civil society of respective regional commissions contributed, in no small measure. They provide us with the opportunity to share and compare experiences, learn from the policies and programmes of others and strengthen

commitments. Thus, we can encourage more effective action and identify further action-oriented measures to advance the goals of gender equality.

As we work towards the ten-year review, we must be keenly aware that the women of the world are watching this process, and expecting it to craft concrete and clear strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document, as well as the Millennium Declaration and outcomes of UN major conferences which build on those agreed at Beijing. They expect those commitments made at Beijing to be preserved and strengthened and the five-year review process to result in agreed measures moving us closer to the realization of the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action and the achievement of equality between women and men.

During these ten years there has been significant progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action and the Outcome of Beijing+5 at international, regional, sub-regional and national levels in all regions, particularly in such areas as education, poverty reduction, women's health, social status and legal status, and participation and representation of women in political life. Progress has also been made in resource allocation, capacity-building including training and research and statistics and data collection. Our analysis of the trends in the status of women in the world was based on the responses by Member States and Observers to the questionnaire, the national action plans designed to implement the Platform for Action; reports submitted since 1995 by States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and information generated since 1995 during the review by the Commission on the Status of Women of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action.

Significant progress has been achieved by Member States, for example, in establishing and strengthening national machineries on the advancement and empowerment of women. National machineries have played a catalytic role in facilitating gender mainstreaming, including setting up vertical and horizontal inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; and creating funding frameworks, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and capacity-building.

Governments have taken steps to ensure that the realities of women's lives are more explicitly addressed in planning and policy-making to eradicate poverty. Progress has been made by pursuing a two-pronged approach of promoting employment and income-generating activities for women, and providing basic economic and social services, including enhanced access to resources, education and health care. Micro-credit for women and small business schemes have emerged as a successful strategy for economic empowerment in many developing countries. Alleviating poverty by improving the situation of female-headed households has received much policy support from many Governments.

Governments have enacted legislation to comply with human rights and international labour conventions that promote women's economic rights, equal access to economic resources and equality in employment. Women's share of employment has substantially increased. Governments have made provisions for improved income security, paid or unpaid parental and sick leave and childcare benefits. They also increasingly address discriminatory and abusive behavior in the workplace and to prevent unhealthy working conditions.

As corroborated by a recent analysis of the status of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2004, significant steps have been taken to achieve progress in girls' education and training, so that all regions have made progress, albeit uneven. Measures were taken in all regions to initiate specific education programmes to reach girls in rural areas, indigenous communities and other disadvantaged groups. Efforts are under way to encourage girls to pursue non-conventional fields of study and to remove gender biases from education.

Steps have been taken to improve women's access to health care, including reduction in maternal mortality, particularly among teenage mothers, and introduction of a gender perspective into health care, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, and greater attention to mental health, occupational hazards and environmental health.

In the area of human rights, provisions guaranteeing the enjoyment of human rights without discrimination on the basis of sex have been included in many Constitutions. Steps have been taken to enact and revise national legislation, including on women's rights, sexual violence, stalking, harassment and trafficking to bring it in line with the CEDAW Convention, other international instruments and directives of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document. Women's access to justice at the national and international levels improved. Law reform measures have included the revision of personal status codes, establishment of family courts and the adoption of family codes as well as reform of citizenship laws.

Perhaps, the most significant achievement in the area of women's rights is the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women by 179 Member Parties, which represents an increase of 35 ratifications since 1995 while its Optional Protocol now has 69 States Parties. The Protocol gives the right to individual women to submit complaints before the CEDAW Committee, once all national legal remedies have been exhausted.

Most States emphasized eradication of violence against women as a national priority area in national crime prevention strategies. Innovative laws have been introduced making special provisions for victim protection, strengthening law enforcement and raising awareness of trafficking in women. However, more concerted action needs to be taken against the criminal networks that continue to turn women and girls into objects for profiteering. This inhumane exploitation of women and girls must be stopped.

Significant efforts to address acts of violence against women, especially during armed conflicts have been made. The Security Council, in its landmark resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent three Statements by the President of the Council, called for women's equal participation in all stages of peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, and ending the impunity of perpetrators of sexual and gender violence in conflict situations. There is growing recognition that armed conflict has different impacts on women and men. Today women's potential contribution to peace-building, peacemaking and conflict resolution is more widely acknowledged.

Closely related to this area is women's role in politics and decision-making and its importance for society, which are recognized as a priority by a growing number of countries. Member States increasingly apply affirmative action policies, including quota systems and targets, develop training programmes for women's leadership and introduce measures to reconcile the family and professional responsibilities of both women and men.

While encouraged by progress, nevertheless, we must be candid in our review and appraisal. No country has fully implemented the recommendations of the Platform for Action and the Outcome Document, nor has full de facto equality for women with men been reached in any society. Moreover, in some countries, the period since Beijing has seen the reversal of some of the gains, which had been made or the resurgence of traditional views of women's roles. These reversals have had multiple causes, including structural inequalities in the division of power and resources, persistent stereotypes, armed conflict, natural disasters and transition from centralized to market economies.

Many challenges such as discrimination, persisting and deepening poverty of women, limited access to education, employment, health care, inadequate economic and financial means, unabated violence and violations of women's rights, including trafficking in women and girls, inadequate women's representation in decision-making and social protection of women, persist with us today.

This ten-year review reminds us, women and men, that we have a daunting task towards full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Outcome Document, the Millennium Declaration and outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits. We must not allow the Beijing Platform to drift slowly into collective memory but serve as a platform for concrete actions, stimulating and focusing new as well as existing programmes at national and international levels alike. We must keep up the momentum for action and for moving forward based on goals, objectives and commitments made at Beijing. We need this commitment in order to make a real and tangible difference for women in each country, each town and each village.

I urge you to review best practices and achievements at the national level with a view to determine how they can be shared with others; how the ten-year review can advance and steer us towards further action; how can we change our working methods and those of the Commission on the Status of Women to enhance its role in implementation; how to benchmark progress; and how to make NGOs' participation more effective. We need to review more critically how we can use more effectively our strategies of gender mainstreaming, rights-based approach, and economic and political empowerment of women. As a first step a Regional Symposium on Mainstreaming Gender into Economic Policies organized jointly by ECE and my Office was held in January 2004.

Let us also focus on areas where action has been limited or lacking and identify opportunities for all stakeholders to plan and agree on joint further action.

Follow-up reviews of other conferences and summits have confirmed that no single conference outcome can be implemented in isolation: sustainable development, population and development, housing, food security and human rights are highly relevant to the achievement of gender equality; similarly gender equality is a cross-cutting theme crucial to the attainment of these other goals.

In 2005, the United Nations will undertake the first comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. Resolution 58/291 of the General Assembly called on the President of the General Assembly to launch a process of open-ended consultations on "suggested modalities, format and organization" of the "high-level plenary event" which will cover comprehensively all aspects of the Millennium Declaration and integrate in the review the broader issue of the follow up to the outcomes of other major conferences and summits. It is crucial that this comprehensive review includes a review of progress and challenges in the fulfilment of the commitments made at Beijing in 1995 and in New York in 2000, including the outcome of the ten-year review Beijing+10.

Though conscious of the magnitude of problems facing us, I am optimistic that we will be successful. And I believe that my optimism is well founded. We have commitments of Member States. We have powerful allies: international organizations, a dynamic civil society and the private sector. We have the knowledge and the power to address and solve many of the ills facing women of the world. What we need is to mobilize the political will and the necessary resources to meet these challenges and to achieve gender equality.

I am confident that your Regional Preparatory Meeting for the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action will identify regional challenges and reflect on strategies to overcome them. Your region has a lot to say about its achievements in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The progress made in most countries of the region is spectacular proving, again and again, the vital importance of the contribution that women make to the

achievement of peace and security, the enjoyment of human rights and democracy, and the development of societies. This makes it even more imperative to overcome the remaining challenges in achieving gender equality in the region.

I call on every Government and actor in civil society in the region to continue to be closely involved in preparations for the ten-year review and to ensure that women's concerns of your countries and your region are reflected in the implementation strategies. As you return home with the decisions of this Meeting, I trust you will continue to be actively involved in preparations at the national level in your personal and professional capacities.

We need your help and your interest to make Beijing +10 the landmark event we hope it will be. We count on you to ensure that attendance of this review is at a high level of your Government. We welcome your ideas, experience and cultural perspectives on practical ways to achieve the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of Beijing+5 for the women and girls of the world.

You have a unique role in framing the challenges, opportunities and solutions for building an inclusive society based on social justice and equality for women, men, girls and boys of the region. On behalf of our Division for the Advancement of Women and my Office, I pledge our full support and cooperation with you and look forward to your guidance and advice, and to the regional strategies you will craft for implementation.

I wish you success in your deliberations.
