

DECLARATION OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC NGO SYMPOSIUM

On Beijing + 5

“Asia-Pacific Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace”

We, the women of the Asia Pacific, claiming our place as sixty per cent of the world's women, declare our determination:

To strive for societies based on individual and social dignity in which women feel strong, active, creative and empowered; where the vital power of our bodies' functioning healing remains intact; where our diverse abilities and talents are valued; and where we may make decisions and choices, express ourselves and move about freely confidently without fear of violence;

To help build a region in which militarism is replaced by peace and where mutual respect between nations ensures that measures are taken to rectify the gross inequalities disparities which have resulted from globalisation;

To celebrate those elements of our regional cultural diversity which enrich and strengthen the role of women in society and to transform those cultural practices which discriminate against women and which, at times, cause irreparable physical, psychological and social damage to women and girl-children;

To work for a world in which resources are sustainably used, equally shared between women and men and equitably distributed within and between States; and

To demand a world in which women are fully empowered and participate equally in definition of structures, systems and policies which determine the framework of our lives.

We recognise that the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) has given some impetus to our struggle towards achievement of this vision.

We reaffirm our commitment to the principles and to the general framework for the achievement of equality, development and peace contained in the BPFA but we deplore the lack comprehensive, integrated implementation of the BPFA by governments within our region.

We acknowledge that some gains have been facilitated by the BPFA process, many of which be attributed to the important contribution of non government organisations (NGOs) and vibrant women's movement.

While we note these gains, we view with concern:

The continued existence of regressive elements and attitudes towards women's empowerment in our region;

The failure to provide high quality, affordable services addressing the primary health needs of women and the persistent, narrow approaches to reproductive and sexual health which have resulted in the failure to ensure effective programs in these areas many governments in the region;

The lack of comprehensive, gender sensitive educational policies that would contribute the elimination of attitudes towards women which act to limit their role in society;

The persistence of a culture of violence against women and the escalating commodification and exploitation of women and girl-children;

The continued degradation and depletion of the environment and the failure to develop effective national, regional and international policies to protect natural resources and ensure their sustainability;

The actual and potential effects of modern biotechnology and information and communications technology which lead to health and environmental hazards, the globalisation of western, consumer culture and value systems and the concomitant exploitation of our lands and resources;

The inadequate attention given to the needs of women and girls who are marginalised because of their disability, or because of race, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or socio-economic status or because they are indigenous people, refugees or displaced persons, migrants or migrant workers, or because of their sexual orientation, reproductive choices or marital status.

The inadequate mechanisms for ensuring that governments are responsive and accountable to citizens for the fulfillment of their international obligations to implement commitments to social and economic development that involves, benefits and empowers women, eradicates poverty and safeguards natural resources;

The lack of political will to empower women beyond statements of policy and legislation and to truly redress systemic and structural imbalances, which is reflected in insufficient resource allocations and support mechanisms to achieve these objectives and the all-too-frequent reliance on micro-schemes and initiatives to address macro, systemic or structural problems.

We recognise the challenges posed by new trends that perpetuate injustices, threaten world peace, and impede women's empowerment. These include:

The negative impact of globalisation and structural adjustment programmes on all the Critical Areas of Concern which act to threaten gains made so far. These include the damage caused by the restructuring of economies to maximise profit without adequate safeguards for the resulting impacts on populations; health sector reforms that reduce women's access to quality, affordable health care; the transformation of the media from a public utility to a transnational enterprise; the increased feminisation of poverty; declining work conditions, wages and labour rights resulting from deregulation and the failure of governments to monitor and control foreign investment;

The increasing influence of multi- and trans- national corporations in international, domestic and local arenas and the failure of the international community to develop mechanisms for their regulation and accountability;

The wresting of economic, legal and political control from local and indigenous communities and the progressive control of natural resources, science and technology including the patenting of life forms by multinational and transnational actors;

The alarming increase in armed and other forms of violent conflict and the perpetuation of the systematic use of violence against women, including rape, mutilation, forced pregnancies and sterilisations, trafficking and forced prostitution and other forms of violence by State, para-State and non-State actors;

The increasing militarisation and nuclearisation of the region;

Among political systems in the region, an escalation in the use of religious, ethnic, cultural and other forms of identity-based constructs to deny women equality, enjoyment of rights, access to resources and a voice, particularly through the use and threat of violence.

Despite these challenges, we draw strength from:

A growing acceptance and commitment towards addressing women's needs by groups within civil society, governments and international organisations;

The growth of NGOs and citizens' movements working for women's empowerment and the variety and creativity of their initiatives, as well as the strengthening of alliances and networks amongst them, and;

The partnerships which have developed between NGOs working for women's empowerment facilitated by the BPFA and other actors in civil society, governments and the UN system.

We therefore commit ourselves to translating our vision for the world, our region and ourselves into a living reality.

To achieve these goals, we must:

Acknowledge the diversity of our circumstances as women and communities, celebrate and find strength in the richness of our plurality and ensure meaningful spaces for each of our voices;

Ensure that our differing realities replace an abstract, undifferentiated concept of women and that these differences are reflected in legislation, policies and interventions and in the articulation of human rights issues;

Ensure that the areas of concern addressed by the BPFA are informed by a holistic approach to women's human rights rather than fragmented, sectoral views;

Ensure that women have access to the power of science and technology;

Ensure that States and civil societies recognise women's entitlement to the full range of personal and social rights available to men;

Ensure that governments, societies and individuals adhere to non-violent forms of conflict resolution and respect the human dignity and rights of women affected by conflict and violence.

Towards this end, we further commit ourselves to finding the means to ensure the full participation of women in our movement, to enhance the solidarity among us and to consolidate our linkages.

Furthermore, we call upon governments, the UN system and civil society:

To reaffirm their commitment to equality, development and peace through the effective implementation of the BPFA, CEDAW and other human rights instruments;

To ensure that women have control over all aspects of their lives including their sexuality as well as equal representation in decision-making at all levels and in all spheres, including leadership positions and governance structures;

To re-examine and re-orient macro economic and development policies to ensure the protection of women's human rights and to redress the growing feminisation of poverty.

Finally, as we leave this century of turmoil, rapid change and development, we call upon the governments of the world to have the courage and commitment to translate the high hopes of the Beijing Platform for Action into concrete actions that help us move from the conflict, inequality and injustices which characterise our region towards the principles of mutual respect, equality and justice reflected in the vision shared by the women of the Asia Pacific region.

ADOPTED ON THIS 3RD DAY OF SEPTEMBER NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETY NINE IN NAKHON PATHOM, THAILAND.