

# Women's Issues ...Five Years After Beijing: Progress & Drawbacks

by HILKKA PIETILÄ

*After 25 years of international efforts, have gender perspectives and assessments of gender impact been “mainstreamed” as part of national laws, plans and programs? Is action being comprehensively monitored? How will the momentum of the global women’s movement be maintained? These questions are explored by Hilikka Pietilä, who took part in all five UN women’s conferences since 1975. Having been Secretary-General of the Finnish UN Association for 17 years, she is now Finland’s “Focal Point” for the UN Institute for Training and Research on Women (INSTRAW) and Honorary President of the World Federation of the UN Associations (WFUNA).*

THE WAY THAT THE UNITED NATIONS determines whether Member States implement the programmes and resolutions they adopt at UN fora is by conducting a review and assessment every five years after a world conference or summit is held. This practice was originally adopted by governments in the World Conference of International

Women’s Year in Mexico City in 1975, and has now been applied to the follow up of all UN world conferences and summits in the 1990s.

## REVIEW AND APPRAISAL AS A REGULAR PRACTICE

The experience of developing and reviewing global action plans on women’s

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issues has a 25-year history (see box). The first three world conferences generated a massive increase in the interest and participation of governments and non-governmental organizations. By the time of the 1985 Nairobi conference, it became obvious that organizing a world conference every five years was not feasible in financial and practical terms. Therefore, no world conference was planned for 1990 for a five-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the 1985 Nairobi agreements. Instead, a modest administrative procedure was scheduled, but it did not succeed very well. Without a major intergovernmental event to highlight the outcome, so few governments were motivated to prepare proper reports that there were not enough to give a global overview. As a result, it was decided already in 1990 that the next five-year review and appraisal should take place at a 1995 fourth world conference on women, which was held in Beijing.

An explicit clause in the Beijing Plat-

form states that it constitutes "a basic group of priority actions that should be carried out during the next five years," meaning that the year 2000 was the time for a five-year review and appraisal. Furthermore, the exercise in 2000 was to cover a longer period, back to 1975. The Mexico World Plan of Action had been extended in the 1985 Nairobi conference, which also adopted the Forward-looking Strategies in order to speed up and strengthen the implementation of earlier plans through the year 2000. Thus, all UN programs for advancement and empowerment of women adopted by the governments in the past 25 years were to expire in 2000.

In June 1998 the UN General Assembly decided to convene — not a world conference — but the 23rd UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS), entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century" (called UNGASS Women 2000 or Beijing+5 for brevity). The Gen-

#### **WORLD CONFERENCES ON WOMEN'S ISSUES**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Outcome document</u></b>
1975	Mexico City	"World Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women"
1980	Copenhagen	"World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace"
1985	Nairobi	"Forward-looking Strategies"
1995	Beijing	"Platform for Action"
2000	New York	"Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action"

eral Assembly has chosen special sessions as the forum for other five-year world conference reviews in the 1990s — Rio+5 for the UN Conference on the Environment (UNCED); Cairo+5 for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD); Cairo+5 for the ICPD; and Copenhagen+5 for the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD).

The Special Session on women's issues (Beijing+5) was held in New York June 5-9, 2000. It was attended by 2,300 delegates from 178 member states and more than 1,000 accredited NGOs represented by 2,000 delegates. In addition, about 1,000 NGO participants attended parallel events organized by a special committee of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) and the US Host Committee at the US Customs House in lower Manhattan. Only five NGOs were given the opportunity to address the GA Special Session among the 207 speakers altogether.

## PROGRESS AND DRAWBACKS

The UN sent a broad questionnaire to member governments to report about their policies and actions to implement the Beijing PFA. Before UNGASS began, 146 of 188 Member States responded to the questionnaire. These replies were summarized in a report, published in January 2000, which is an excellent source of information on achievements at the official level (United Nations, 2000a).

Several other reports facilitated the review and assessment. Every five years since 1984 the UN system has jointly

produced a world survey on the role of women in development. The surveys are multisectoral and interdisciplinary in scope, and have provided timely and important background resources for the five-year review and assessments of successive world conferences on women. In 1999 the fourth survey in the series was published with a focus on "globalization, gender and work" (United Nations, 1999b). This survey is based on research, knowledge and data produced by appropriate UN organizations and agencies, not relying on information given by governments only.

Two other reports which compiled and analyzed plenty of statistical information also came out in time for the Special Session. One was UNIFEM's new biennial report titled "Progress of the World's Women 2000" which covers from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s, i.e. from the Nairobi Conference to the GA Special Session 2000 (UNIFEM, 2000b). The second report is "The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics" published by the UN Statistics Division (United Nations, 2000b), which updates data and analyses from the 1991 and 1995 editions.

These four new UN reports provide an abundance of information on the situation of the world's women today and the progress achieved in recent decades. They also present many criteria and indicators, which have been in short supply until lately. The information available on women in the UN sources

## WOMEN NEED PEACE, AND PEACE NEEDS WOMEN

Women from around the world have urged the UN Security Council to take stronger action to protect women and girls during conflicts and ensure women's full participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding. These calls came on 24-25 October when the Security Council held its first-ever debate on women's experiences in war and its aftermath. Women and children account for over three-quarters of the 40 million people displaced worldwide, mainly due to conflicts.

"Without international action, women caught in conflicts will be stranded in a vast security void," said Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the UNDP-administered UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). "And without their full participation in peace processes, there will be no justice or sustainable development." She said the Security Council was demonstrating an unprecedented willingness to bear witness to women's experiences of war, and described the Council sessions as an important step towards increasing protection and fully prosecuting war crimes such as rape, sexual exploitation, torture and mutilation.

Opening the debate, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies," and have "proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls." Anwarul Karim Chowdhury of Bangladesh called on the Council to send a strong message that, "Women need peace, and more importantly, peace needs women." During the debate, representatives of more than 40 countries supported strengthening protection for women and their role in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

"If the Security Council wants peace, they must seek it where it is found," said Dr. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika of the Organization of African Unity's Women's Committee on Peace and Development. She cited examples of women's role in promoting peace in conflicts in Mali, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda.

Women's direct participation at the peace table is the only guarantee that women's needs and interests will be a part of peace agreements, said Luz Mendez, General Coordinator of the National Union of Guatemalan Women, who participated in her country's 1996 peace negotiations. "As the result of the efforts of women, the Guatemalan Peace Agreements include specific

commitments aimed at giving women new opportunities for their social and economic participation and access to their rights.”

Prior to the debate, a coalition of women's organizations and United Nations agencies working for women's equality called on the Security Council to mandate:

- A full investigation of the impact of war on women and girls
- A full assessment of women's role at the peace negotiation table
- Increased protection for women and girls in conflict situations, including refugee camps
- Enforcement of codes of conduct and gender training for UN peacekeepers and police
- More women in peacekeeping operations
- Consultation with women and women's organizations in all peace missions.

is very broad and qualitatively high level — if only the governments, women researchers and activists would make full use of it. At the same time, there are some shortfalls in the data. For example, information on violence against women is still scattered and comparative statistics on it are rare, because this issue is so sensitive and traditionally largely silenced. A continuing problem is that national statistical offices still don't disaggregate their information adequately, despite repeated UN requests for this since the 1970s.

### **ALTERNATIVE REPORTS FROM PEOPLE AND NGOS**

This time there was double-checking of governments' implementation of the programmes for advancement and empowerment of women. In addition to

the obligation of member states to report periodically to the UN, there are active NGOs and women's groups in most member countries which follow up on these issues more closely than the UN ever can. An NGO representative at Beijing put it this way:

*For the NGOs the Beijing PFA is the 'culmination of women's struggles for justice in their diverse contexts around the world and an embodiment of their vision and hopes for the society that recognizes women's rights as human rights', and not just an international document to pay lip service to, as it is to many political delegates."*

The NGO women attending the meeting of the Preparatory Committee for UNGASS in March 1999 initiated the idea of preparing *alternative reports* on the implementation of the PFA. The

NGOs used the same questionnaire which was sent to governments by the UN. The NGO reports commented on the reports of their governments, made their own assessment of implementation in their countries, recorded their own implementation activities, and proposed additional actions for forthcoming years.

Altogether 116 alternative reports were received. Of these 80 were national reports from 57 countries (several reports from some countries), 15 were regional reports, and 14 were theme reports. The individual reports were compiled into regional reports, and these were then summarized into an "NGO Alternative Global Report" (CONGO, 2000). Before the opening of the Special Session, this report and highlights of regional reports were given to its President, Theo Ben-Gurirab (Namibia).

The most important function in preparing alternative reports was to mobilize women in countries all over the world to study the reports of their governments and criticize and comment on them at home. The work done and the ideas collected in this process also provided NGO women the necessary substance and competence for commenting on the official draft Outcome Document prepared for the Special Session. Their country-level work led to the creation of the Coalition in Support of the Beijing Platform for Action, comprising 171 NGOs and networks from every region of the world.

During the March 2000 Preparatory

Committee for UNGASS, the Coalition presented a paper giving a "package" of proposed amendments, additions and deletions to the draft Outcome Document of the conference. The Coalition paper was the first to be introduced and negotiated directly with government delegations. The next stage was NGO lobbying operations, adopting the same strategies as in earlier UN conferences. NGOs used all possible occasions to present the Coalition's proposals, monitor government negotiations on official draft documents and prepare more suggestions and amendments. The lobbying activities naturally continued intensively until the last sessions of the negotiating groups during the Special Session.

Altogether the official and the non-governmental reports on implementation of the PFA contain a huge amount of information and experience to be analysed and used to facilitate further work in the advancement and empowerment of women. Unfortunately, research groups in the UN system and at country levels probably have very limited financing and other resources for doing this kind of work. In fact, it is even rare for such political and women researchers to be included in UN system reports and documentation.

### **INTERNET AS A CHANNEL FOR WOMEN'S VOICES**

For some years, the United Nations Internet websites have included a gateway to global information on women

called WomenWatch. In connection with the Beijing+5 review, the UN system itself introduced another way for individuals from all over the world to communicate their views, experiences and suggestions directly to the intergovernmental system. This was done by opening, on the WomenWatch Internet pages, global online working groups on implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing PFA. Concerned men and women everywhere were invited to participate in these electronic groups. The new channel was jointly facilitated by the three UN bodies concerned with women — the UN Division for Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW.

This innovative use of the Internet was a very successful and exciting exercise in communication. It could even be called a *global democracy experiment*. Most of the lists were open for about six weeks in latter 1999, but the list on “End violence against women” lasted 16 months from October 1998 to February 2000. It culminated in a great live global video conference on “A World Free of Violence against Women” in the General Assembly Hall at the UN on International Women’s Day 1999. Altogether 10,000 individuals from over 120 countries subscribed to these virtual working groups, and more than 1,000 contributions were posted. Many others had one-to-one exchanges that contributed to the overall dialogue but were not seen on the screen.

This was the first time that this kind of follow-up exercise was provided for the review of any UN world conference or summit meeting. One may ask, was this just another privilege for women of the global North? But the participation spread surprisingly evenly, with 45 per cent from the South and 52 per cent from the North, though exact distribution is difficult to get since most e-mail addresses don’t indicate country of origin. By comparison, only 19 per cent of Internet users in general are outside Europe and North America. In some of the working groups, for example on environment and decision-making, more than half of the contributions came from the South. On average more than half of the contributors were from NGOs. Between 13 and 30 per cent of the participants were from governments, 24 per cent were academic people, and the lowest group was from intergovernmental organizations at 7 per cent (United Nations, 2000c).

Furthermore, the Internet working groups provided an unparalleled new opportunity for civil society to participate directly in the intergovernmental process. One might like to ask, what was the weight and importance of 1,000 Internet interventions by NGO and civil society directly to the UN bodies, compared with only five statements allotted to the NGO representatives in the formal plenary of UNGASS?

All material from this Internet exchange is available in the archives of

WomenWatch. It is a huge repository of case examples, failures and successes, experiences and reviews which are more authentic and personal than the governmental or even the NGO reports as such. Will researchers or relevant UN bodies analyze and benefit from it for its interest either as substance or as an experimental new option for the use of information technology? The Women-Watch website contains the reports of each on-line working group at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/forum>.

### **UNGASS – HARD WORK AND MEAGER RESULTS**

The Beijing Platform for Action is so rich and progressive, and its recommendations for policies and actions so concrete and practical, that it is apt to create overwhelming hopes and expectations. The visions about forthcoming improvements and progress in women's lives causes women to expect a lot from their governments. They also motivate, encourage and mobilize women to struggle and work by themselves. The review and assessment not only summarizes achievements, but also reveals shortcomings and drawbacks, which cause disappointment and frustration.

Since Beijing, some new trends and macro-processes have gained momentum more than was foreseen five years ago. The expansion and further liberalization of international trade and the accelerating globalization of economic structures have produced consequences of unexpected

dimensions. There have been repercussions on the policies of industrialized countries regarding the financing of development cooperation and allocations to UN agencies. The decline of allocations from the North has seriously hampered developing countries and the UN in their implementation of programmes adopted by the world conferences.

The NGO Alternative Global Report identifies policies that have aggravated "feminization of poverty." These include the privatization of public services, trade liberalization, deregulation of economies, withdrawal of subsidies, downsizing of governments, substitution of food production by cash crops, and failure to monitor and regulate the inflow of foreign capital and enterprise. The Report also draws attention to the low pay and insecurity of women's jobs, and it claims that "government policies of the last five years have not only failed to address this issue, but some policy decisions have actually exacerbated the situation".

Another major problem is the fatal and devastating plague of constantly increasing HIV/AIDS infections, especially in Africa, but spreading in all continents. Originally it appeared more often among men, but in recent years has rapidly increased among women and girls due to several reasons, including traditional customs and beliefs. In Africa the prevalence of HIV infection among women is now higher than among men, with young women under age 25 constituting the group most at risk. Ninety-

five per cent of people with HIV live in developing countries, whose resources and other prerequisites for effective health policies are already insufficient and strained. In addition, the African regional alternative report claims that Africa now is worse off than it was five years ago in terms of HIV and AIDS, as well as armed conflicts which render women more vulnerable to violence.

The shadow of these trends permeated the atmosphere of the review and appraisal process, especially in the minds of women from the global South. The realities of their lives contradicted the expectations and hopes created by the Beijing Conference and the adoption of the PFA five years before. "We cannot speak about the Beijing plus five, for us it is a Beijing minus five!", many Southern women felt, while women in the economically prospering North do not adequately realize the connections between the policies of their governments and the fate of the South.

The same forces which in Beijing had fought fiercely against progress and for reversing the achievements made in Cairo and other pre-Beijing world conferences have not given up. They were active again both during the Preparatory Committee meeting in March and Special Session in June. Catholic fundamentalists from various countries with their allies from some Islamic countries managed to slow down and even stall the negotiation process to the extent that at times it felt as if the whole conference would fail. The ques-

tion was raised, whether it would be better not to have any outcome document at all than to adopt a very bad paper diluting even the PFA text?

As a result, government delegates as well as NGO observers spent long nights struggling through irrelevant arguments and mere filibuster by certain government representatives. The Special Session ran past its closing time by more than 24 hours. Finally the five-year review and assessment of the implementation of the Beijing PFA was concluded — a very important outcome as such — but few steps forward were made.

The outcome document, containing the Political Declaration and the document on "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action," was unanimously adopted in the final plenary (United Nations, 2000e). There, governments reaffirmed their commitments to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and pledged further action to ensure its full and accelerated implementation. This decision implies that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is extended for five more years, until 2005, as the single valid intergovernmental programme for advancement and empowerment of women in these years.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS, OBSTACLES AND FURTHER ACTIONS**

Two hundred paragraphs of recommendations to be implemented in forthcoming

ing five years are contained in the final outcome document of the Special Session. They are given its section on "Actions and initiatives to overcome obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing PFA." In comparison with the language of the Beijing PFA, however, this document is weak and incoherent. It is like a patchwork, hundreds of detailed suggestions and recommendations follow each other without systematic structure and priorities. Obviously this is due to the extremely difficult atmosphere, the lack of time, and the lack of unity among Member States at the Special Session. Little more than a year was allocated for its preparation, while the preparations for a world conference usually take three to four years.

The first thing for governments to do after the Beijing 1995 conference was to translate the PFA into the national language in countries where none of the official languages of the UN (English, French, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic) is generally spoken. There are no statistics about this task, but we heard fairly soon after the Beijing Conference that PFA was translated in some big countries into several native languages (six languages in India, for example), that women in East African villages were studying PFA in the regional language Swahili, that the PFA was issued in more "reader-friendly" language in English-speaking Canada, etc.

The second task given to governments

in the PFA was to prepare National Action Plans for implementation of the PFA in each country within a year, latest by the end of 1996. The PFA itself set the instructions and deadline for this task, one of its rare time-bound targets. Not all countries were able to produce it in that period. A survey in September 1997, two years after Beijing, showed that 112 countries had an action plan finalized and 21 more had a draft — a total of 133 countries or 70 per cent of the 189 countries which participated in Beijing. The UN Secretariat reports having received national action plans only from 116 Member States, two observer states, and five regional or subregional groups, which makes 123 action plans altogether.

Developments in three out of the 12 critical areas of concern in the PFA call for some discussion:

- **Education and training** is the field where signs of progress are very clear. School enrolment in general has increased in almost all regions, and girls' enrolment in many countries more than boys', thus the inequality gap is declining. At the secondary level many countries showed great increases in female enrolment in 1985-1997 (UNIFEM, 2000a). Feminization of tertiary level education is spreading in many countries, with increasing numbers of women attending colleges and universities and doing longer studies than men. The goals were to close the

gender gap in primary and secondary education and reduce the women's illiteracy by half from the level of 1990 by 2005. Another general target is to ensure free compulsory and universal primary education for all, both girls and boys and improve the adult literacy by 50 per cent by 2015.

- **Violence against women** has been criminalized almost everywhere, but is still increasing both at home and in new types of armed conflicts. The Special Session condemned "honour killings" and forced marriages for the first time in an international consensus document. Stronger measures were called for to eliminate "dowry related violence" and female genital mutilation, and to legislate against domestic violence in general, including marital rape and sexual abuse of women and girls. It was confirmed that violence against women and girls is a human rights issue, and thus the various forms of violence against women are human rights violations. There was also agreement to work towards the elimination of commercial sexual exploitation, as well as economic exploitation, including trafficking in women and children and female infanticide.
- **Women and economy.** Women's participation in paid work has risen in almost all regions of the world,

and it has also spearheaded overall employment growth in recent years. Everywhere except Africa, women's employment has grown substantially faster than men's since 1980 — but usually under conditions inferior to those associated with men's employment (United Nations, 1999b). As women's employment rises, problems in reconciling employment and family responsibilities are increasingly felt, due to lack of supportive services and low participation of men in household chores.

#### **OTHER RESULTS: MAINSTREAMING MISSING**

Furthermore, some important results and outcomes achieved in these years are not recorded in the outcome document.

First, gender awareness has improved. The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development considers it a great achievement that "the conferences and summits of the 1990s and their five-yearly reviews were crucial in raising gender awareness in the world. The Survey notes that these events "had the cumulative effect of placing gender at the centre of international discourse on policymaking relating to environment, population, human rights, food security and social development" (United Nations, 1999b).

Second, the improvement of the status of women in the UN Secretariat is not recorded in the review and appraisal documents, though clear targets were set

for it in the PFA. Very rapid improvement has taken place between 1989 and 1999; the percentage of women in the UN Secretariat who hold senior and decision-making positions increased fivefold at D-1 level (from 6.4 per cent to 34.3 per cent) and almost tripled at D-2 level (from 8.2 per cent to 23.2 per cent). The great improvement is due to very radical instructions given by the Secretary-General in 1993 for “exceptional measures to recruit, promote and deploy women in the shortest possible time”, and to the Strategic Plan of Action for Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) introduced in 1994. The latest target is to achieve parity 50/50 by the year 2000.

Early stage in his time in office, Secretary-General Kofi Annan established two important positions which enhance his cabinet's expertise in gender-related issues and its representation of women. In January 1997 he appointed Angela E.V. King, an experienced UN veteran from Jamaica, as Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women. In early 1998, a new post of Deputy Secretary-General was established as the highest position next to the Secretary-General, and which is understood to be held by a woman as long as the SG is a man. The Secretary General appointed Ms. Louise Fréchette from Canada as the first one to hold this post.

These recent developments are worth-

while mentioning, since many people believe that the UN itself is not very good in implementing recommendations adopted by Member States. (A/54/403, 27 Sept. 1999). The progress made in 1990s regarding the status of women in the Secretariat probably beats any administration in the Member States.

Third, the outcome document definitely should have dealt with (but did not) a very important core issue which penetrates the whole PFA: the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies and actions of Member States and the UN system. The recommendation for “an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes and an analysis of its effects on women and men, respectively” is emphasized and repeated in connection with almost everyone of the twelve critical areas of concern in the PFA.

In a meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) two years after Beijing, governments approved the “ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions” (ECOSOC 1997/2). In this agreement, governments placed an obligation on the UN system to apply gender mainstreaming throughout the system. In a way, these conclusions also recognize that gender mainstreaming is an element in, and a means to integrate and coordinate, all the work of the UN system in this respect.

Also the report of the Secretary General on Review and Appraisal recalls that “*Gender analysis was established as a*

*basic requirement for mainstreaming strategy. The current situation of women and men in relation to different issues/problems and the impact of planned policies, legislation, and projects and programmes on women and men respectively — and on the relations between them — should be analysed before any decisions are made. Gender analysis should go beyond cataloguing differences to identifying inequalities and assessing relationships between women and men.... Mainstreaming also requires transformative change.”(United Nations, 2000)*

In the Outcome Document from UNGASS, however, there is hardly anything about mainstreaming and only a couple of passing references to gender impact assessment. The only achievement mentioned is that “within the UN system much progress has been made in the mainstreaming of a gender perspective”(para 18) and that “progress has also been made to integrate the human rights of women and mainstream a gender perspective into the UN system, including into the work of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Commission on Human Rights”(para 20).

Fortunately in the Political Declaration of the Special Session the governments do

*“Reaffirm the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the process of implementing the outcome of other major United Nations con-*

*ferences and Summits and the need for a coordinated follow-up to all major conferences and Summits by Governments, regional organizations, and all of the bodies and organizations of the UN system within their respective mandates.” (para 7.)*

In fact, gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessment are the most far-reaching obligations set by the PFA. Naturally, they apply to each and every one of the Member States within their countries, since they adopted it unanimously for themselves in Beijing in 1995 as the core requirement of the Platform of Action. Enforcement of these obligations by making them part of the law in Member States would create an automatic mechanism for gender mainstreaming and equality which operates in all legislation and policymaking in the future. On this issue, implementation absolutely needs to be enhanced in the years to come.

## **GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT BEING CREATED**

Within the decades since the 1970s the mobilization of women has taken place on a world scale and with an accelerating pace, and a worldwide women's movement has been born. The NGO Tribune in Mexico City already in 1975 was described as the “largest consciousness-raising session ever held”. The NGO Forum in Nairobi 1985 has been referred to as the “birth of global feminism” (UN, 2000d). The NGO Alternative Global

Report states that "as we moved beyond the 1980s, it became clear that what we had created was a global women's movement and what we had set in motion was nothing less than a revolution" (CONGO, 2000).

The global conferences of the 1990s were pivotal in the development of a politically able and astute global women's movement. "Strengthened by the three women's world conferences of 1975, 1980, and 1985, women moved to the forefront in these conferences (in the 1990s), claiming a space and voice in the resulting policies. These conferences served as training grounds for a new leadership by bringing hundreds of women into the public policy process and resulting, in many countries, in a 'critical mass' of women with political clout" (CONGO, 2000).

From the beginning, the world conferences in the 1990s were seen as constituting a global agenda for development. The governments and the UN have adopted the method of review and appraisal for an integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the major United Nations conferences and summits. The next stage will be Rio+10, Vienna+10, Cairo+10, Copenhagen+10 (etc.) processes, following the completion of the five-year reviews.

The follow-up of the Beijing Conference often seems to be lumped together with all the major conferences and summits, though its purpose and nature (and the earlier women's conferences as well)

were basically different from other world conferences. The women's conferences did not deal with a particular theme, but brought to the global agenda the interests and aspirations of women which have not been heard equally before.

The particular nature and importance of the advancement of women was understood in the UN system when the series of world conferences on environment, human rights, population and social development, the so-called global agenda, was planned in the beginning of the 1990s. The Secretary-General's introduction to the UN Blue Book on Advancement of Women stresses that "the goals they [the other world conferences] seek are all dependent upon the advancement of women" (United Nations, 1995b, para. 220).

### **FUTURE WORLD CONFERENCES ON WOMEN – WILL THERE BE ANY?**

To continue the progress of the global women's movement and maintain momentum in the advancement and empowerment of women, a strong demand for holding in 2005 a new world conference on women has been expressed by the NGO community. This was voiced at Beijing+5 preparatory meetings of the ECE region in January 2000 and the Beijing+5 and of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2000. This call also received broad support from the global NGO community gathered during the UNGASS in June 2000.

However, what the governments

agreed to in the Political Declaration adopted in the UNGASS was less specific. Its paragraph 9 agrees

*“to regularly assess further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with the view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, 10 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and 20 years after the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies”.*

What the NGOs are asking is only that the governments *specify the event in 2005 to become a world conference of a particular kind*. It would not be a replica of the Beijing, but should comprehensively review and assess how gender concerns are mainstreamed in the whole process of integrated implementation of the other major United Nations conferences and summits. The central aims of such an overarching “meta” world conference in 2005 would be to:

- review and appraise progress in the years 1975-2005 in the empowerment of women since the Mexico Conference and the implementation of and follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action;
- assess progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in implementation and follow-up of the other major United Nations conferences and Summits, as well as of their impact on the life of women in 1990–2005;

- develop goals and strategies to meet the needs of women arising from new global trends and enhance women’s full participation in shaping the policies for integrated and coordinated implementation of the global agenda for development in the 21st Century.

In its substantial session in summer 2000, ECOSOC made the first “Assessment of the progress made within the United Nations system, through the conference reviews, in the promotion of an integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields”. That assessment gives new grounds for considering what kind of major conference “on women” could best analyze the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the whole process of the implementation of the global agenda. Such analyses were clearly not done in the series of five-year reviews of the 1990s’ world conferences just conclude. Even the review of the implementation of the Beijing PFA neglected to cover mainstreaming.

Concerning the outcome of the Beijing+5 process as such, it became obvious that a GA special session would not be the effective mode of event to bring about new plans and strategies for continuing the process in the future. Another kind of a procedure is needed in order to achieve three goals: systemwide review and appraisal of women’s empowerment and gender mainstreaming, for

guaranteeing the continuation and momentum of the process, and providing a wide NGO Forum for the world's women to bring their views and aspirations into the proceedings of the global agenda in the future. ■

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