



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by International Public Policy Institute and Pathways to Peace, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Advocating a global conference on women

We urge the Secretary-General, the Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to join with non-governmental organizations, civil society and funding sources to work towards a global conference on women. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) will not happen until women empower themselves with the support of men, institutions and Governments. A world conference on women under United Nations auspices would raise consciousness and mobilize networks and circles of women at every level of society and across the world. It would energize a global women's movement, which is necessary to create the political will needed to bring about gender equality. Together, political will and compassionate action can end violence against women and girls in its many forms and further a "mother's agenda" whereby all children have what every woman wants for her own child, beginning with living without fear of violence. The holding of such a conference and the effects rippling out from it will be steps towards the creation of a culture of peace in the home and in the world.

"It has been made absolutely clear that women need to become activists on their own behalf." This was the conclusion reached by the authors of the largest global study ever conducted on violence against women, as detailed in the September 2012 issue of *American Political Science Review*. They found that only strong feminist movements are able to voice and organize around the top priorities of women. The study found astonishingly high rates of sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, violence in intimate relationships and other violations of women's bodies and psyches. The study included every region of the world, varying degrees of democracy, rich and poor countries and a variety of the world's religions. It covered 85 per cent of the world's population. Without strong feminist movements, the abuse of women is sidelined, subordinated to men's needs or to the priorities of institutions or political parties.

Grass-roots efforts to mobilize support for a global conference on women gained the support of the two most important leaders of the United Nations. On 8 March 2012, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, in a joint announcement, proposed the convening of a global conference on women by the United Nations in 2015, 20 years after the previous women's summit, held in Beijing. "Given that women make up half of humanity and given the importance and relevance of women's issues for global progress, it is high time that such a world conference is convened. It is all the more important because of the enormous changes the world is going through, with both positive and other implications for women", they stated in the announcement, noting that the enthusiasm of civil society, particularly women's organizations, for such a conference had added extra strength to the proposal. It seemed likely that they were responding to the campaign for a fifth world conference on women. The symbol "5WCW" on big blue buttons had been worn by supporters at the United Nations and displayed on websites and newsletters. The petition for the conference contained more than 15,000 signatures, and 120 organizations had registered their support online when the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly made their joint proposal. They asked Member States to take the necessary steps for a world conference on women

in 2015, which would have happened if representatives in the Assembly had responded favourably. However, no action was taken during the sixty-sixth session.

Member States that do not support gender equality were expected to oppose the convening of a fifth world conference on women. However, Governments and non-governmental organizations that support the empowerment of women also failed to back the proposal. Concerns were expressed about the cost of a conference and the assumption that it would be organized like the Beijing Conference. The concern was that participating Member States could reopen discussion about and change the agreed-upon objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. Not to hold a twenty-first-century global conference on women, however, would be to miss the opportunity to energize a global women's movement, which is necessary for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). A twenty-first-century world conference on women would bring the younger generation of women leaders together while intergenerational mentoring is possible. Women organize through relationships, bond with one another and reduce stress through conversation, and can share information and support one another by way of e-mails, social networks, blogs and other technologies, which are now available for the communication of ideas and the raising of funds.

A conference under United Nations auspices without a simultaneous meeting of Member States is a solution. UN-Women was not in existence when the first four conferences were held. United Nations entities such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization sponsor or co-sponsor international summits and conferences without the 193 Member States meeting simultaneously. Support from philanthropists, individuals and foundations, civil society organizations and various Governments is required in order to hold a conference and award grants to individual women belonging to organizations in developing countries that do much on the ground but lack the funds needed to send members to an international meeting. Yet these are the women who inspire and do much with the support that we can provide and whose reports most spark outrage and touch hearts, in order to stop the exploitation and abuse of girls and women.

A global conference for women and girls and the proliferation of women's circles would support women in acting on their own behalf, a model similar to that of the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s in the United States of America, which began with consciousness-raising groups and led to local and regional conferences and then to four United Nations World Conferences on Women, beginning with the Conference in Mexico City (1975), followed by those in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Circles are an effective means by which women can mobilize around deeply held values. The archetypes of sisterhood and motherhood connect women at a deep psychological and spiritual level, providing validation of reality and support for action in the best interests of themselves and their children.