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**REVIEW OF ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF
THE COMMISSION, INCLUDING THE PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE
REPORT FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009 AND THE WORK OF THE
ESCAP REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

(Item 3 (g) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL
MEETING TO REVIEW REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING
PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND ITS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OUTCOMES**

SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes was held in Bangkok from 16 to 18 November 2009. The theme of the Meeting was "Accountability and implementation: making change happen through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action". It was organized by ESCAP in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, built on the strategies and priority areas identified at previous United Nations conferences on women. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been reviewed every five years.

The present report provides an overview of the proceedings of the Meeting, including its agreed outcome, namely, the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing + 15, which represents the Asia-Pacific region's input to the global review of the Beijing Platform for Action to be conducted during the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Key areas of concern highlighted in the Declaration include the impact of the economic crisis on women, the low level of representation of women in politics, the need for further progress in attaining gender parity at all levels of education and the need to close wage and employment opportunity gaps between men and women. High ratios of maternal mortality, violence against women, human trafficking and discriminatory laws were cited as other key areas of concern.

The Declaration called upon the secretariat of ESCAP to continue its support to member States for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to continue to play a coordinating role, as well as to provide members and associate members, upon request, with technical assistance to build national capacity to mainstream a gender perspective and a rights-based approach in all programmes through mechanisms and processes such as gender budgeting, gender auditing, sex-disaggregated data and monitoring and performance indicators.

The Commission may wish to consider endorsing the recommendations of the Meeting, as contained in the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing + 15, and provide the secretariat with guidance on the implementation of the provisions of the Declaration.

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I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION OR BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

BANGKOK DECLARATION ON BEIJING + 15

We, the Representatives of the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, meeting in Bangkok from 16 to 18 November 2009 for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes, organized as part of the Asia-Pacific regional preparatory process, adopt the following declaration:

Reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,¹ adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,² and deeply convinced that the Beijing Declaration is an important contribution to the advancement of women worldwide in the achievement of gender equality which must be translated into effective actions by all States, the United Nations system and other relevant organizations,

Affirming that gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are essential to advance development, peace and security,

Acknowledging the call for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, as set forth in the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration,³

Also recalling Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, 1820 (2008) of 19 June 2008, 1888 (2009) of 30 September 2009, and 1889 (2009) of 5 October 2009 on women, peace and security and other relevant United Nations resolutions,

Also recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁴ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,⁵ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁶ the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁷ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁸ the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁹ and other relevant human rights instruments,

Noting the participation of civil society organizations in the preparations for the Asia-Pacific Review of Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

² See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-third Special Session, Supplement No. 1* (A/S-23/13).

³ See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

⁵ See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁶ See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁷ See General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965.

⁸ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

Commending the Executive Secretary of ESCAP for re-establishing the Regional Coordination Mechanism's Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, which has contributed to enhanced coordination and coherence among regional United Nations partners in the advancement of women and gender equality as a means to promote sustainable and inclusive development in the region;

Welcoming the proposed changes in the United Nations gender architecture to support progress on gender equality and women's empowerment at the global level, and noting the need for the new global entity to cooperate closely with ESCAP at the regional level, through, among other things, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism;

Expressing concern that:

(a) While the region has established itself as an economic powerhouse and experienced rapid economic growth, inequalities have grown in many countries and women have disproportionate representation among the poor, and this has been exacerbated during the recent financial crisis;

(b) While women make strong economic contributions, they also comprise the majority of temporary, low paid, and low-skilled workers in the region, often working without any form of social protection, which increases their vulnerability to discrimination;

(c) Women continue to bear the major responsibility for unpaid work, particularly care giving work, and this contributes to weaker labour market attachment for women, weaker access to social security benefits and less time for education/training, leisure and self-care and political activities;

(d) While gender parity has been achieved by some countries in girls and women's education, there is still a substantial need for progress in large parts of the region;

(e) Improvements in girls and women's education have not been systematically translated into greater economic opportunities for many women in the region, and women on average are paid considerably less than men and underemployed;

(f) Factors such as culturally ingrained son preference, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, the disproportionate impact of malnutrition on girls, early marriage, child prostitution and the commercial sexual exploitation of children continue to undermine the rights of girls and limit their potential;

(g) While there has been some welcomed progress in increasing women's representation in politics, through, among other things, quotas or reserved seats for women in a number of countries, there continue to be low levels of women's representation in politics, and few countries in the region have reached the 30 per cent target representation level established by the Economic and Social Council;

(h) Some parts of the region have unacceptably high rates of maternal mortality, and there has been a lack of progress in the region on women's reproductive health and rights;

(i) There has been an alarming rise in new HIV infections among women from spouses and intimate partners in the region, and that the regional coverage of anti-retroviral drugs and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV treatment for both men and women remain below the global average;

(j) Despite strong progress by some countries in the region in combating trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, trafficking continues to be prevalent in the region;

(k) Not all countries in the region are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(l) Discriminatory practices, violations of women's and girl's rights and impunity – especially with regard to violence – persist in countries of the region, and enactment and implementation of domestic laws to address discrimination and violence against women should remain a priority;

(m) While information and communication technologies (ICTs) have brought considerable benefits to women in the region, women still lack equal access, and these technologies have also aided the proliferation of pornography and sexualized, disparaging and violent imagery of women on the Internet, and are creating new forms of exploitation of women, including its use in facilitating and organizing the trafficking of women and children;

(n) While women are largely responsible for natural resource management in the household, they have been excluded from developing, planning and implementing environmental policies when women are, in fact, together with children and the elderly, among the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change;

(o) While women living in countries in conflict or post-conflict situations have special needs and play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, they are still underrepresented in decision-making in conflict and post-conflict situations;

1. We, the Representatives of the members and associate members of ESCAP, reaffirm our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

2. In making this reaffirmation, we commit to the following concerted actions:

(a) To intensify efforts towards the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third session of the General Assembly and to overcome obstacles encountered in their implementation;

(b) To promote active mainstreaming of a gender perspective, among other things, in the design, implementation and evaluation of regional, national and local policies and programmes, including the development of gender analysis tools for the effective monitoring and assessment of gender gains and gaps;

(c) To strengthen the role of national machineries and other institutional mechanisms that work towards the advancement of women and gender equality, through, among other things, definite commitment of financial and other appropriate assistance, and ensuring adequate and appropriate staff and resources;

(d) To take effective action towards the creation of an enabling environment at the national level by ensuring the participation of women on an equal basis with men at all levels of decision-making necessary to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of life;

(e) To undertake full and effective action for the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, recognizing that gender equality is a goal in its own right and is central to all other goals;

(f) To promote joint responsibility of men and boys with women and girls in the promotion of gender equality, including in areas such as domestic and care-giving work and responsibilities, and addressing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour;

(g) To implement economic policies that are designed and monitored with the full and equal participation of women within the overall framework of achieving sustainable development and ensure poverty eradication programmes, especially for women, in particular during periods of economic hardship;

(h) To strengthen or establish accountability mechanisms that promote gender responsiveness in national policymaking, planning and public expenditure management through financial allocations and public spending which effectively advance women's economic, social, political and cultural rights;

(i) To intensify support for statistical capacity-building efforts on the generation of gender statistics and to provide timely, reliable and disaggregated data by sex, ethnicity, age and location and the development of methodologies for the collection and processing of these gender statistics; and to ensure that gender statistics inform policy and programme decisions and effectively monitor and assess gender gains and gaps;

(j) To contribute to collaborative approaches and strategies aimed at protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of women workers, in particular women in the informal sector, rural women, and migrant workers;

(k) To address the persistent discrimination and serious human rights violations against female migrants;

(l) To strengthen the provision of and ensure equal access to adequate, affordable and accessible public and social services, including education and training at all levels, as well as to all types of permanent and sustainable social protection/social security systems for women throughout their life cycle, and supporting national efforts in this regard;

(m) To enhance women's entrepreneurial potential by providing them with access to and control over resources, including knowledge and skills training, trade opportunities and technologies;

(n) To review and, as appropriate, revise national policies, programmes and legislation to ensure high-quality, affordable and accessible health care and services for all women, taking into account the diverse needs of women, and to undertake key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,¹⁰ paying particular attention to achieving the specific benchmarks to reduce maternal mortality, to increase the proportion of births assisted by skilled attendants, to provide the widest achievable range of safe and effective family planning and contraceptive methods and to reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS;

(o) To intensify efforts to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, provide protection to the survivors, investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of violence against women and girls, and engage men and boys, as well as community and faith-based organizations, in eliminating violence against women;

(p) To elaborate and ensure that capacities and resources are available to implement multisectoral national strategies to eliminate violence against women, including measures to combat all forms of trafficking in women and girls;

(q) To address and develop measures to combat ICT-related violence and exploitation of women;

(r) To include a gender perspective and harness the active participation of women in the development of ICTs;

(s) To ensure the protection of women and girls, in particular against sexual violence, during and after armed conflicts, in accordance with the obligation of States under international humanitarian law and international human rights law;

(t) To ensure the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution;

(u) To mainstream a gender perspective in environmental, disaster management and climate change adaptation programmes;

(v) To ensure that women's needs and knowledge of natural systems are used in the development, planning and implementation of environmental policies, including adaptation strategies;

(w) To strengthen agricultural policies and mechanisms to incorporate a gender perspective, and in cooperation with civil society, support farmers, particularly rural women, with education and training programmes, as well as to strengthen the dissemination of information to them that would enable them to access services and resources for improving productivity;

(x) To consider ratifying or acceding to, as a particular matter of priority, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol,¹¹ limit the extent of any reservations, and withdraw reservations that are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention or otherwise incompatible with the relevant treaty;

¹⁰ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

¹¹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2131, No. 20378.

(y) To promote, protect and respect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, through, among other things, the full implementation of obligations under all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(z) To continue efforts to repeal laws and eradicate policies and practices that discriminate against women and girls, and to adopt laws and promote practices that protect their rights and promote gender equality;

(aa) To increase partnerships with civil society and the private sector for the promotion of gender equality, and to support the role and contribution of civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations and women's organizations, in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly;

(bb) To review regularly the further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and, in 2015, to bring together all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, to assess progress and challenges, specify targets and consider new initiatives as appropriate twenty years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(cc) To strengthen regional and subregional dialogue and cooperation among members and associate members of the Commission as well as other relevant stakeholders on policy options and issues crucial to the region and for conveying the regional voice of Asia and the Pacific in global processes;

3. Request the Executive Secretary of ESCAP making effective use of the existing resources and mobilizing additional voluntary resources as necessary to:

(a) Strengthen the role of ESCAP in supporting members and associate members in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and the recommendations of the Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes;

(b) Mainstream gender dimensions into all subprogrammes under the ESCAP programme of work;

(c) Provide members and associate members, upon request, with technical assistance to build national capacity to mainstream a gender perspective and a rights-based approach in all programmes, through, among other things, mechanisms and processes, such as gender budgeting, gender auditing, sex-disaggregated data and monitoring and performance indicators;

(d) Support members and associate members in ratification/acceding to and/or implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(e) Mobilize the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism to further develop mechanisms and plans to promote action to combat violence against women and trafficking in women and children, including a coordinated regional response and follow-up activities on the Secretary-General's Campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women;

(f) Strengthen the coordination role of ESCAP as the Chair of the Regional Coordination Mechanism in serving to achieve further synergies on the advancement of women and gender equality among United Nations entities in the region;

(g) Submit the present outcome document to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-fourth session and to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for consideration at its sixty-sixth session.

II. PROCEEDINGS

A. Opening session

1. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP delivered a welcoming address. She stressed the importance of Asia and the Pacific being a region where women and girls live free from poverty, violence and discrimination.

2. The Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women delivered a global status report on gender equality and empowerment of women. She emphasized the importance of the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign and drew the Meeting's attention to the Security Council's recent adoption of two resolutions on sexual violence in armed conflict.

3. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in her statement, emphasized reducing maternal mortality and increasing women's meaningful political participation as high priorities for future action.

4. Ms. Patricia Licuanan, President of the Miriam College and Convener of the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing + 15, reported on the outcome of the Forum, which had been held in Manila from 22 to 24 October 2009. Ms. Licuanan stated that the Forum had called upon all member States to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, protect human rights, strengthen mechanisms to improve women's rights, invest in research on media and information and communications technology and its impact on women's rights and end impunity for war crimes, with a focus on violence against women.

5. Ms. Chompoonute Nakornthap, Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, in her statement, emphasized the importance of government action to advance gender equality. She stated that Thailand recognized the role and positive impact that the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Millennium Development Goals had had in helping countries to achieve and maintain their gender equality goals. She also stressed that Thailand considered it critical to translate commitments into action.

B. Accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Asia-Pacific region: gender-responsive planning and public spending

6. It was decided to have panel discussions on agenda items 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. The panel discussion for agenda item 4 was moderated by the Chairperson of the Meeting, Ms. Fiamé Mata-afa. Panelists included Ms. Emmeline Verzosa, Executive Director of the Philippine Commission on Women, the Deputy Executive Director of UNIFEM and Ms. Hameeda Hossain, Chairperson of Ain O Shalish Kendra, Bangladesh. Presentations were made on gender-responsive planning and public

spending in the Philippines, including gender-responsive and results-oriented budgeting at the local level and use of a performance-based system. Speakers pointed out the gap between rhetoric and reality in relation to gender and public spending and highlighted how public spending was being used to mitigate the impact of the economic and financial crisis on women and girls. That the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had not been accompanied by appropriate legislative reform in many countries was also cited as an area still requiring attention.

C. Highlights of progress and challenges in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action: good practices, obstacles and new challenges

7. Taking up agenda item 5, the Chairperson invited countries to report on their progress towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and share good practices, obstacles and new challenges.

8. The representative of China reported on new measures taken since the Beijing+10 review to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women in the areas of legislation, education, health, women's rights, women's participation in decision making and the economy. China recognized that challenges remained in such areas as lifelong education and training opportunities, violence against women and discrimination against women in employment.

9. The representative of Viet Nam reported on progress in the area of law reform with the introduction of the Law on Gender Equality, which had come into force in 2007. He also highlighted the development of a national strategy on gender equality for 2011-2020 and progress in the areas of women's representation in parliament, literacy rates and women's economic security and property rights. He emphasized the importance of pursuing economic progress in tandem with social progress and poverty reduction. He then reflected that challenges remained in the areas of human trafficking, HIV and AIDS, poor access to information and technology and traditional attitudes towards gender roles.

10. The representative of Japan reported on progress in the areas of women's representation in policy-related decision making, economic security, work and family balance, including the Charter for Work-life Balance, and the introduction of nursing care insurance for older persons, whereby nursing care is supported by the society as a whole. In its official development assistance, efforts had been made to improve the status of women and Japan was preparing its Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality to reach the goal of a gender-equal society. Japan recognized that the issues of violence against women, poverty of women, trafficking in persons and gender sensitive development assistance remained important challenges.

11. The representative of the Philippines reported on progress in the areas of women's rights and strengthened national machinery with the enactment of the Magna Carta of Women. She also reported progress in the areas of violence against women through an inter-agency mechanism; gender and peace; women's economic empowerment; women's participation in governance and business; increased participation in the labour force and decision-making; human rights and the media. Reference was also made to proposals to amend discriminatory provisions in laws and to mainstream gender into a climate change commission. The revision of laws discriminatory to women and enactment of women-friendly laws as well as ensuring that women had access to decent jobs and social protection were cited as priority areas and challenges.

12. The representative of Indonesia reported on progress in the areas of women's human rights, women's representation in decision making, including its new Law on Political Parties, which required that women constitute at least 30 per cent of the membership for any political party to be established. After the general elections of 2009, the percentage of women in Parliament increased to 17.49 per cent, which was higher than the original estimate. The Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence enabled victims to report cases directly to the police for prosecution and allowed for legal penalties against perpetrators. In addition, the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women had been prepared and both the National Anti-Violence Committee and the National Commission on Violence against Women had been established. In the area of education, Indonesia had made scholarships available to girls, revised textbooks to make them more gender sensitive and heightened public awareness of gender equality at all levels of education. Indonesia had also taken steps to address continuing challenges such as the trafficking in persons.

13. The representative of New Zealand stated that the Beijing Platform for Action served as the comprehensive blueprint for international action to promote the advancement of women and reported on progress in the areas of women's economic participation (including women's labour force participation rising to 63.3 per cent), representation in decision making in public and political spheres and educational advancement. Regarding the lack of progress in reducing maternal mortality rates globally and in the region, New Zealand had co-sponsored a resolution in the Human Rights Council on maternal mortality and morbidity. The representative acknowledged that violence against women and the need for more progress for New Zealand's indigenous Maori women remained challenges for the country.

14. The representative of the United States of America reported on progress in the areas of women's machinery, informing the Meeting of the establishment of (a) the White House Council on Women and Girls, which provided a coordinated response to issues such as equal pay, family leave, child care, violence against women and women's health; and (b) the position of White House Advisor on Violence against Women and Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, whose work focused on integrating women's issues into foreign policy. The Government had signed legally binding treaties that help empower women, and ratification was a high priority for the Obama administration. She stated that addressing human trafficking was a priority area for her Government, as was HIV and AIDS. The United States had also introduced Security Council resolutions 1820 and 1888 to address sexual violence in conflict situations. The representative further pointed to the gap between de jure and de facto equality and the need to address legal discrimination against woman and underscored the importance of the establishment of a new gender entity in the United Nations.

15. The representative of Thailand reported an increase in women's participation in decision making and more access to education and opportunities. Thailand's Tenth Economic and Social Development Plan included a Women's Development Plan which was aimed at promoting a positive attitude towards gender equality; women's economic participation, increased opportunities for women to participate in politics and women's security. Thailand had also created a Gender-related Development Index Plus, a tool for analysing women's development and gender equality in specific areas. Thailand was also a strong supporter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children.

16. The representative of Singapore reported that the recommendations of the 2009 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women Leaders Network meeting, held in Singapore, had been endorsed by the APEC Ministerial Meeting. Singapore prioritized investing in its people and providing equal access and opportunity for all. She reported that progress had been gained in the areas of work-life balance, women's labour force participation, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields. Representation of women in parliament at 24.5 per cent, was higher than the world average of 18.5 per cent. Challenges remained in the areas of gender stereotypes and wage gaps between men and women.

17. The representative of Palau, speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group, informed the Meeting that there had been an increase in women's participation in public life and use of gender indicators and steps to reduce violence against women. Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum had committed, in August 2009, to eradicating sexual and gender-based violence and to ensuring equal protection and access to justice for all. Issues affecting women with disabilities had received more attention, and gender mainstreaming capacity in government was being given attention in six countries. Strong networking among women's departments and with a range of organizations in the Pacific had enabled progress to be made. The lack of women's representation in parliament, marginalization of women's departments and violence against women continued to be challenges for women along with the broad challenges of climate change, disaster reduction, trade and economic development.

18. The representative of Brunei Darussalam reported that her country's "2035 Vision" included equal opportunities for women in all areas as an important goal. Progress had been made in the areas of women's education at all levels as well as overall literacy rates, labour force participation and, in particular, in professional, technical, managerial and administrative as well as male-dominated fields; health care and life expectancy; entrepreneurship and participation in the business world; and reduction in poverty and violence against women. Legislation was in place to address violence against women and girls and to enable women married to foreign nationals to pass on their citizenship to their children. Legislation on human trafficking was also in place. Creating more women- and mother-friendly workplaces, obtaining more sex-disaggregated data and strengthening capacity for gender mainstreaming and reducing violence against women remained important challenges.

19. The representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic reported on progress in the areas of women's representation in decision making: women now comprised 25 per cent of representatives in the National Assembly; revisions to the Constitution and laws had been enacted to eliminate discrimination and protect women's rights; and the women's national machinery had been strengthened, which included the establishment of the Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women. Progress had also been made with regard to: (a) women's access to resources and girls' access to higher quality and gender-sensitive education; (b) addressing human trafficking; and (c) population and development with a focus on women. Challenges remained, particularly for women in rural and remote areas and regarding the need to ensure that socio-economic development benefited women.

20. The representative of the Maldives reported on progress in the areas of maternal health, pointing out that there had been a large decline in the maternal mortality ratio. The 2008 Constitution had been amended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and remove the restriction on women holding the office of President. There had also been progress on women's economic security, equal parenting rights, social protection and violence against women. The women's machinery of Maldives had been strengthened through the National Plan of Action

towards the Empowerment of Women and Gender Equality and a national policy on gender equality with a gender management system. Gender mainstreaming was now being led by the Office of the President. Challenges that remained included: unlawful, extrajudicial marriages of girls; girls being kept out of school; women's limited participation in political and public life; human trafficking; HIV and sexually transmitted infections; and mail order brides.

21. The representative of Myanmar reported on progress in the areas of women's non-formal and formal labour force participation, education and poverty reduction, especially in rural areas. Legal provisions against gender-based discrimination had been included in the Constitution for decades. Women's health remained an area of priority for the Government with the maternal mortality ratio at 316 per 100,000 live births. Attention was being given to addressing the challenge of HIV and AIDS and to keeping the incidence of violence against women relatively low. A number of steps were being taken to address human trafficking.

22. The representative of Kazakhstan reported that his country had adopted a comprehensive strategy to address gender equality, which included the establishment and democratization of the national women's machinery. There had been progress in the areas of women's representation in decision-making bodies and in education, but challenges remained in the area of violence against women.

23. The representative of Sri Lanka reported that a bill to establish a national commission on women was being finalized; the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2005) had been passed and sexual harassment investigation committees had been introduced in all ministries and public companies. Most of the Millennium Development Goal targets had also been met, and measures had been taken to increase women's political participation and address human trafficking. The Ministry of Women and Child Development had established a network to address the concerns of migrant women workers and was working closely with the new Ministry of Human Rights. The Government was also providing support for female-headed households and older women. New challenges included assisting women with disabilities through economic empowerment, addressing the needs of women in the construction industry and in conflict or disaster-affected areas and incorporating gender equality requirements in the annual budget.

24. The representative of Australia reported that advancing gender equality was an integral part of the country's foreign aid programme and the reduction of violence against women and reproduction health services were priority areas, as was promoting women's leadership in the Pacific. The national women's machinery comprised three agencies, including a Sex Discrimination Commissioner. In 2009, Australia had acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had introduced a paid parental leave scheme. Progress had also been made in women's representation in decision making and in addressing human trafficking and violence against women. Challenges remained with regard to improving socio-economic outcomes for indigenous women, increasing women's representation on private sector boards and promoting women's economic security.

25. The representative of Mongolia reported on progress in the area of violence against women with the introduction of the Law on Domestic Violence (2004). The national women's machinery had also been strengthened and the National Council on Gender had been placed under the Prime Minister's Office. In addition, a bill on gender equality was scheduled for debate in the Parliament in late 2009. Challenges remained in the areas of women's representation in decision-making bodies despite

the large number of highly educated women; poverty, violence and human trafficking as well as environmental degradation.

26. The representative of Pakistan reported that the Government had launched a national plan of action to implement commitments relating to the Beijing Platform for Action and respond to the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A law providing for protection for working women had recently been enacted, and draft legislation regarding domestic violence and protection against harassment in the workplace was currently before the parliament. Furthermore, quotas of 33 per cent women in local government and seats reserved for women in national and provincial assemblies were in place. The representative indicated that, although women were important contributors to the economy, their share in economic benefits, opportunities and access to resources was not proportionate to their contribution. Increasing poverty resulting from structural adjustment programmes and globalization was also disproportionately impacting women.

27. The representative of Bangladesh reported that steps had been taken to reduce poverty, especially among the poorest, which included many female-headed households, through such measures as the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction-II, support for entrepreneurship, access to credit, training and cooperatives. A Vulnerable Group Development Programme also provided food and training for many poor women. Legislation such as prevention of Cruelty to Women and Children Act, the Acid Crime Control Act, Dowry Prohibition Act and Child Marriage Restraint Act were in place and a draft bill on prevention of domestic violence was in the final stage of consultation with stakeholders and would soon be enacted. She also reported that, in 2008, her Government had put in place a recommendation that women constitute 33 per cent of candidates nominated by political parties for parliamentary elections. Furthermore, many ministries now had to report on how spending affected women and poverty.

28. The representative of Nepal reported that progress had been achieved in the last decade, particularly in increasing the participation of women in decision making. Out of a total of 601 representatives in the Constituent Assembly, 197, or 33 per cent, were women. Nepal had amended 65 discriminatory laws and enacted domestic violence legislation in 2009. A Gender Responsive Budget Committee had been established under the Ministry of Finance, and there had been significant improvements in girls' education, including scholarships and the training of many more female teachers. The Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction had adopted a policy to have women constitute 33 per cent of local peace committees in all districts; a Gender Equality Act had been passed in 2006 and a bill on sexual harassment in the workplace had been approved by the Council of Ministers.

29. The representative of Afghanistan reported on the country's 10-year national action plan for women and progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. A commission to eliminate violence against women had been established, and the adoption of a law to eliminate violence against women was in progress. Attention to gender equality had been incorporated into policy frameworks and the Constitution, and women could now pursue an education and a career. Gender units, gender indicators and a database on gender as well as a gender studies institute were being established. Women comprised 25 per cent of Parliament and 39 per cent of all registered voters. The representative highlighted challenges in such areas as strengthening accountability, preventing the marginalization of women in security and political issues, promoting aid effectiveness through gender mainstreaming and strengthening alliances with Muslim women in the region.

30. The representative of Timor-Leste highlighted the creation in recent years of a legal framework in his country, the detailed provisions on gender equality in its Constitution and the significant commitment that the country had made to strengthening women's rights and gender equality, as exemplified by the establishment in 2008 of the position of Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality. The priority areas included education, health, justice and agriculture. Timor-Leste had ratified (without reservations) the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol and had passed a law against domestic violence. Furthermore, the inclusion of land and property rights in the Civil Code had been approved by the Council of Ministers and was awaiting approval by the National Parliament.

31. The representative of Malaysia reported that, due to improvements in health care services, female life expectancy in the country had increased from 76.2 years in 2005 to 76.5 years in 2007. One of the Government's key performance indicators in the fight against poverty was to have 4,000 women entrepreneurs by 2012; in that regard, the Government had made available training programmes and a financing scheme. Malaysia had undertaken measures to widen its definition of violence in its Domestic Violence Act. The representative highlighted women's underrepresentation at the decision-making level as a key challenge and indicated that the Government was implementing measures to rectify the problem. Additional measures had been taken to address the issues of human trafficking and HIV and AIDS.

32. The representative of Samoa reported that, since 2005, Samoa had strengthened its legal and policy framework for the advancement of women, and a draft national policy and plan of action for women were now in place. The Strategy for the Development of Samoa focused on sustainable economic and social progress, which emphasizes the importance of women's participation at all levels. The representative highlighted women's health, climate change and disaster reduction as priority areas and called for disaster risk reduction strategies through sector-wide engagement to strengthen the capacity of women to ensure maximum preparedness.

33. The representative of Azerbaijan reported that the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, with a ministerial portfolio, had been established in 2006, replacing the State Committee for Women's Issues. She highlighted the success Azerbaijan had had in establishing a gender budgeting system to ensure equal division of State financial resources and economic equality between women and men. She also reported that Azerbaijan was working to eliminate gender stereotypes, especially among youth, and raise awareness, especially among women in remote areas, of women's rights and the legal protection available, including to combat domestic violence. Health services had also been increased and improved.

34. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran highlighted progress for women in economic, social and cultural fields due to the implementation of policies and laws, such as those supporting entrepreneurship and providing assistance for women breadwinners. The representative informed the Meeting that there had been a dramatic improvement in women's life expectancy in 30 years, from 56 in 1976 to 74 in 2006. She noted that women had achieved high rates of literacy as well as educational and professional attainment, including important political positions. She indicated that challenges remained in raising the status of families and in promoting social security.

35. The representative of Vanuatu pointed to the gender parity that had been achieved in primary education and the significant improvements recorded in maternal health. Skilled personnel now assisted in 70 per cent of births, and 83 per cent of

women were receiving antenatal care. In the area of gender-based violence, the Family Protection Act, passed in 2008, was a major milestone. Support for women entrepreneurs had produced positive results. A national development plan for women from 2006 to 2012 was in place, and access to reproductive health care and screening for cervical cancer was available. Progress in the area of women in decision making and employment was still a challenge.

36. The representative of Bhutan reported that gender, care, support, protection and the rights of women were central themes in the Constitution, which had been adopted following the transition to democracy in 2007, and in national plans. The National Plan of Action on Gender (2008-2013) highlighted key challenges faced in combating violence against women and in improving women's participation in politics and decision making. He informed the Meeting that a gender information database was being developed to support policymaking and the promotion of gender equality.

37. The representative of Solomon Islands reported that her country had made progress in addressing domestic violence and sexual assault with the establishment of a national policy on the elimination of violence against women with a five-year action plan and a Family Violence Unit under the Ministry of Police. A bill on political parties, which included a provision for a 30 per cent quota for women, would soon be considered. There was also greater awareness of the need for strengthening women's participation in decision making at the national level. A new national gender equality and women's development policy was awaiting Cabinet endorsement, and measures had been taken to strengthen women's economic empowerment. Climate change and natural disasters were cited as key challenges. Natural disasters had displaced a number of communities and caused emotional trauma, problems with food security and access to land, and had exacerbated violence against women.

38. The representative of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS reported that the largest number of new HIV infections occurred among married women. There were an estimated 50 million women in the region at risk of HIV infection from their husbands or long-term partners. Women in intimate partner relationships with men who were abusive or whose husbands had sexual relationships outside of the marriage were seven times more likely to become infected.

39. The representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) informed the Meeting that UNDP supported global, regional, country and local level work related to meeting the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals to achieve gender equality. She stated that UNDP was also active in addressing challenges related to gender equality, including violence against women and the need for a better balance between work and family life.

40. The representative of the Commonwealth Secretariat reported on plans to harmonize the Beijing + 15 review with the mid-term review of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for 2005-2015. Key areas of focus were: (a) gender, democracy, peace and conflict; (b) gender, human rights and the law; (c) gender, poverty and women's economic empowerment; and (d) gender and HIV/AIDS. She also announced that the ninth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Meeting would be held in Barbados in 2010 and would focus on women's rights and the advancement of gender equality beyond the financial crisis and recovery.

41. The Meeting also heard statements from the representative of International Women's Rights Action Watch and the representative of the National Movement for the Eradication of Sex Trafficking.

D. Responses to the economic crisis – women’s economic security and rights

42. The Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section, Trade and Investment Division of ESCAP, moderated the panel discussion under agenda item 6. Panellists included the Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, who presented findings from the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* (2009),¹² the theme of which was “women’s control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance”. She stressed that the source of many gender inequalities was unequal access to resources, which had created disadvantages for women. Many women worked in the informal sector, where they were subject to precarious working conditions. Furthermore, women had been more affected by the financial crisis than men. Women were not only directly affected by job losses but also indirectly affected since they often had to take up additional work to compensate for income losses when their husbands or men in their family lost their employment.

43. Other panellists included. Ms. Devaki Jain, a development economist from India, Ms. Kanda Vajrabhaya, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand and Ms. Bijaya Rai Shreshtha, Programme Coordinator of a Nepalese NGO, Pourakhil. The attention of participants was drawn to issues such as the need for a new macroeconomic framework which would integrate women’s issues, the projected impact of the economic crisis on women in Thailand and the response of the Government. It was stressed that, in South-East Asia, women would be affected by the 2008 economic crisis given that they constituted a large share of the workforce in most industries affected by the crisis, such as export-oriented industries. The third panellist focused on migrant women.

44. A short discussion followed the presentations. Regarding differences between the responses to the 1997 crisis and the current global crisis, panellists responded that, this time, countries had been better prepared. They pointed to the example of Thailand, where the response to the 2008 crisis had been more gender-sensitive than in the case of the 1997 crisis. Other questions were raised on how to prevent the trafficking of women. One delegation pointed out that it had established a women’s foreign employment network. The large numbers of undocumented female workers in the region was highlighted, as was the need to create more opportunities for women to migrate through formal channels.

E. Closing gender gaps in achieving the Millennium Development Goals

45. Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, State Minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of Bangladesh, moderated the panel discussion under agenda item 7. Panellists included Ms. Meng Xiaosi, Vice-Chairperson of the National Working Committee on Children and Women of the State Council, Vice-President of the All China Women’s Federation, who shared her country’s experience in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, Ms. Tahmineh Daniali, Deputy Head of the National Heritage Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who spoke on her country’s progress towards implementing the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective and Ms. Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Vice-President of the Asian Development Bank, who outlined progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals from a regional perspective.

46. A short discussion period followed. The potential of strategic partnerships among development actors to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals was reviewed.

¹² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.7.

**F. Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women in Asia and the Pacific:
successes and challenges**

47. Ms. Heisoo Shin, Representative of the National Movement for the Eradication of Sex Trafficking,¹³ moderated a panel discussion under agenda item 8. Panellists included Ms. Bumairam Mamaseitova, Member of the Kyrgyzstan Parliament, and Ms. Gulnara Baimambetova, Director of the Women Entrepreneurs Support Association, Kyrgyzstan, who highlighted how the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had facilitated the securing of land rights for women in that country, followed by Ms. Sri Danti Anwar, Deputy Minister of Women's Empowerment of Indonesia. She highlighted the many measures Indonesia had taken since acceding to the Convention some 25 years before but observed that, despite those gains, challenges remained and informed the Meeting that Indonesia would undertake the measures necessary to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Other panellists, along with the UNIFEM Regional Programme Director for East and South-East Asia, stressed the importance of accountability mechanisms, and Ms. Imrana Jalal, from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, pointed out benefits as well as constraints faced by Pacific island States in ratifying and implementing the Convention. Ms. Audrey Lee from International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific analysed the implementation of the Convention from a human rights framework.

48. The Moderator informed the Meeting about the new guidelines designed to simplify country reporting to the various treaty bodies. She explained that there was now one common core document for reporting under the core human rights treaties.

G. Informal briefing on the new composite entity

49. The Chairperson invited the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to lead an informal briefing on the proposed new United Nations gender architecture, as agreed by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/311 of 14 September 2009.

50. The Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women explained the background and rationale for the General Assembly resolution. She said that the establishment of a new composite entity, headed by an Under-Secretary-General, would mean women's rights would be awarded the same status as other issues. She said that the entity would support greater coordination in the United Nations system and with Member States to deliver on gender equality. She indicated that expectations were very high and that it was important for the new body to be well resourced.

51. The Deputy Executive Director of UNIFEM indicated that the new composite entity would support greater accountability of the United Nations to women. She informed the Meeting that a consultative process would be undertaken with member States and civil society in the next six months to determine the ideal framework for the new body.

52. In the ensuing discussion, the need for the new body to be adequately funded and for ongoing work to continue without disruption was emphasized.

¹³ She is also a former member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

H. Regional campaign to end violence against women

53. Under agenda item 9, the Chairperson invited the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to lead a panel discussion on the issue of violence against women. The representative of Kiribati shared his country's experience in addressing violence against women and shared the findings of recently released research and Ms. Farida Shaheed, Independent Expert on Cultural Rights under the United Nations Human Rights Council, spoke on the experience of Pakistan in addressing violence against women. Another panellist, Ms. Thin Lei Win from Reuters AlertNet, Asia Bureau, indicated how the media could play a role in addressing the issue of violence against women and Mr. Nur Hasyim, Manager of the Men's Program Division of Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, spoke about engaging men and boys to reducing violence against women. Ms. Mary John Mananzan, a Missionary Benedictine sister and author from the Philippines, discussed the role of faith-based organizations in ending violence against women.

I. Adoption of the declaration and closing

54. The Meeting had before it the draft Bangkok declaration on Beijing + 15 (E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1), which had been prepared by a drafting committee that met throughout the Meeting. It had been agreed that the title "declaration" would be used rather than "communiqué". The Declaration was adopted.¹⁴ The Executive Secretary made a closing statement and the Chairperson declared the Meeting closed.

III. ORGANIZATION

A. Attendance

55. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following members of ESCAP: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; China; France; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Palau; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; United States of America; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

56. Representatives of the following States Members of the United Nations attended as Observers: Bulgaria, Canada, South Africa and Switzerland.

57. Representatives of the following United Nations Secretariat units attended the Meeting: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The meeting was also attended by the following specialized agencies or other organization in the United Nations system: the International Labour Organization, UNDP, UNIFEM, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the United Nations Population Fund.

58. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also attended: Commonwealth Secretariat, International Organization for Migration, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Asian Development Bank.

¹⁴ For the text of the Declaration as adopted, see Chap. I.

59. In all, there were 376 participants, including 158 representatives of ESCAP member States. A total of 218 representatives of United Nations specialized agencies or other organization in the United Nations system, States not members of ESCAP and non-governmental organizations attended.

B. Election of officers

60. The Meeting elected the following officers:

Chairperson:	Ms. Fiame Mata-afa (Samoa)
Vice-Chairpersons:	Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury (Bangladesh) Mr. Kouraiti Beniaato (Kiribati) Mr. Ram Bachan Ahir Yadav (Nepal) Ms. Tevita Falefau (Palau) Ms. Yee Shoon Yu-Foo (Singapore)
Rapporteur:	Ms. Yoriko Meguro (Japan)

C. Adoption of the agenda

61. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Asia-Pacific region: gender-responsive planning and public spending.
5. Highlights of progress and challenges in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action: good practices, obstacles and new challenges.
6. Responses to the economic crisis—women's economic security and rights.
7. Closing gender gaps in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
8. Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Asia and the Pacific: successes and challenges.
9. Regional campaign to end violence against women.
10. Adoption of the communiqué.
11. Closing.

Annex

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Document title</i>
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/L.1	3	Provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/L.2/Rev.1	3	Annotated provisional agenda
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/2 and Corr.1	5	Highlights of progress and challenges in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action: good practices, obstacles and new challenges
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/3	6	Responses to the economic crisis — women's economic security and rights
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/4	7	Closing gender gaps in achieving the Millennium Development Goals
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/INF/1		Programme
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/INF/2		List of participants
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/INF/3	4	Financing and accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/INF/4	8	Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Asia and the Pacific: successes and challenges
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/INF/5	9	Regional campaign to end violence against women
E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1	10	Draft Bangkok declaration on Beijing + 15

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