



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW), a non-governmental organization 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The year 2020 will mark 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China in 1995. We acknowledge the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which came out of the conference is, along with the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the major blueprint for gender equality and the empowerment of women. As the women of the Asia Pacific region prepare national and regional reports to feed into the 25 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we once more witness the highly participatory nature of these processes.

We have come a long way in the 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women's movements born from this process remain committed on the long haul of gender equality and organising. We have made many gains on this journey towards gender equality, and new and emerging opportunities come up and challenges grow. Movements have risen and fallen, feminist activist friends have died, those involved in the walk to Fourth World Conference on Women are getting older. New movements are emerging.

For the last 25 years women's advocates, human rights defenders and feminist groups in the Asia and Pacific region have been actively involved in shaping a new development agenda that adequately addressed human rights, including women's rights and gender equality. As the development agenda changes and the goalposts move under the guise of a new global development agenda spaces for activism shift and change. The negotiation processes are complex, frustrating and at times dangerous but with each new development paradigm new opportunities arise to re-shape global understandings of development in a struggle towards social, economic, ecological and gender justice. The internet and social media for communication has given rise to new advocacy spaces, quicker mobilising and connecting across different feminist groups and movements around the world; it is allowing speedy responses to key issues. Many younger feminists have come into the movement, championing new forms of protest and movement building. New feminist agendas are emerging, linking intergenerationally, documenting progress and gains, providing evidence of lives' realities, changes and challenges in the women's human rights agenda. There is also constant political push back and an increasing militaristic climate that continues to impact on safety and security of human rights defenders.

Over recent years feminist groups and networks in the Asia and Pacific region have experienced increasingly harsher push back in civil society participation in national, regional and global processes, including United Nations bodies and processes. Civil society advocates have been facing ever more repressive and securitized political environments. Intimidations, restrictions and reprisals have been common tactics used by Member States, as well as non-state bodies, to silence and fragment women's groups and networks. Individual and collective activism is facing a global pushback from Member States, corporations and the politically far right. This push back is felt at the national, regional and international levels.

Diminishing resources due to the lack of prioritization of women's issues creates further division among competing agenda points. This, combined with a lack of funding and resourcing for creating intersectional, intergenerational and cross-regional discussions means we are witnessing an intensification of the gap between policy and lived experience resulting in growing inequalities, increased social isolation and an increase in the feminisation of poverty. New risks and challenges related to fairness, inclusion, privacy and autonomy, accountability and transparency are becoming increasingly apparent.

The politics of powerful State actors in the Asia and Pacific region are becoming even more problematic. This impact of geopolitics and the widening uneven global playing field, results in women being positioned in multiple vulnerable situations. Women are largely excluded from the processes and forums where decisions are being made with regard to approaches to national security and military intervention. This applies in all countries across the region, not only conflict affected countries. For there to be sustainable peace, the diversity of women's voices must be heard in all decision making and policy processes, so that all options – not only military, security and police strategies – can be used to fully address national and global security, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and to build sustainable peace. For there to be a genuine, inclusive and just society, women's meaningful participation must be recognised as the norm and not the exception, across local, national, regional and international contexts, building on the transformative elements of the Security Council resolution 1325 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Asia Pacific region has among the poorest development indicators for women and girls. Gender-based violence remains a problem, some countries face higher rates of gender-based violence than global averages. Complex forms of violence, such as child marriage and gender biased sex selection, reinforce gender inequality across the region. Deep-rooted gender inequality and discriminatory norms and practices reinforce patriarchal systems. Many countries in this region have the lowest rates of political representation. Nowhere in the Asia Pacific region are women's land, property and inheritance rights, or their access to economic opportunities, equal to those of men.

Climate change is a growing threat to progress on gender equality, particularly in Asia and the Pacific. Globally of the top ten countries deemed most at risk to threats caused by climate change, six are in Asia. While in the Pacific Island States the effects of climate change have become an urgent part of everyday life for Pacific islanders, these countries are already witnessing displacement due to rising sea levels and growing emergencies caused by extreme weather. Women bear the major brunt of climate change impacts, are more likely to become casualties of extreme climate events, face increased violence in the aftermath of disaster, and are more affected by drought, floods, crop loss and dwindling means to access water.

As we move towards the 25 year review of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its tendrils become more interwoven into the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is important we do not lose sight of the agreements within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Agreements derived from the collective experiences and analysis of the remarkably diverse 17,000 participants and 30,000 activists who came from around the globe with a single purpose in mind: gender equality and the empowerment of all women everywhere.
