

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*

The Fourth World Conference on Women,

Having met in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995,

1. Adopts the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which are annexed to the present resolution;
2. Recommends to the General Assembly of the United Nations at its fiftieth session that it endorse the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as adopted by the Conference.

SECTION L

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L. The girl child

259. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status" (art. 2, para. 1). 11/ However, in many countries available indicators show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100.

The reasons for the discrepancy include, among other things, harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference - which results in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection - early marriage, including child marriage, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being. As a result, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood.

260. Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Initiatives should be taken to prepare girls to participate actively, effectively and equally with boys at all levels of social, economic, political and cultural leadership.

261. Gender-biased educational processes, including curricula, educational materials and practices, teachers' attitudes and classroom interaction, reinforce existing gender inequalities.

262. Girls and adolescents may receive a variety of conflicting and confusing messages on their gender roles from their parents, teachers, peers and the media. Women and men need to work together with children and youth to break down persistent gender stereotypes, taking into account the rights of the child and the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents as stated in paragraph 267 below.

263. Although the number of educated children has grown in the past 20 years in some countries, boys have proportionately fared much better than girls. In 1990, 130 million children

had no access to primary school; of these, 81 million were girls. This can be attributed to such factors as customary attitudes, child labour, early marriages, lack of funds and lack of adequate schooling facilities, teenage pregnancies and gender inequalities in society at large as well as in the family as defined in paragraph 29 above. In some countries the shortage of women teachers can inhibit the enrolment of girls. In many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic chores at a very early age and are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and an early drop-out from schooling.

264. The percentage of girls enrolled in secondary school remains significantly low in many countries. Girls are often not encouraged or given the opportunity to pursue scientific and technological training and education, which limits the knowledge they require for their daily lives and their employment opportunities.

265. Girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society, with the result that they are not offered the same opportunities as boys to take part in decision-making processes.

266. Existing discrimination against the girl child in her access to nutrition and physical and mental health services endangers her current and future health. An estimated 450 million adult women in developing countries are stunted as a result of childhood protein-energy malnutrition.

267. The International Conference on Population and Development recognized, in paragraph 7.3 of the Programme of Action, 14/ that "full attention should be given to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations and particularly to meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality", taking into account the rights of the child to access to information, privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent, as well as the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and legal guardians to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in conformity with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Support should be given to integral sexual education for young people with parental support and guidance that stresses the responsibility of males for their own sexuality and fertility and that help them exercise their responsibilities.

268. More than 15 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year. Motherhood at a very young age entails complications during pregnancy and delivery and a risk of maternal death that is much greater than average. The children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality. Early child-bearing continues to be an impediment to improvements in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. Overall, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long-term adverse impact on their and their children's quality of life.

269. Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, have a devastating effect on children's health, and girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. Girls often face pressures to engage in sexual activity. Due to such factors as their youth, social pressures, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, particularly

sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, and forced labour.

270. The girl child with disabilities faces additional barriers and needs to be ensured non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. 30/

271. Some children are particularly vulnerable, especially the abandoned, homeless and displaced, street children, children in areas in conflict, and children who are discriminated against because they belong to an ethnic or racial minority group.

272. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information.

273. In addressing issues concerning children and youth, Governments should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on girls and boys, respectively.

Strategic objective L.1. Eliminate all forms of discrimination
against the girl child Actions to be taken

274. By Governments:

(a) By States that have not signed or ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, take urgent measures towards signing and ratifying the Convention, bearing in mind the strong exhortation made at the World Conference on Human Rights to sign it before the end of 1995, and by States that have signed and ratified the Convention, ensure its full implementation through the adoption of all necessary legislative, administrative and other measures and by fostering an enabling environment that encourages full respect for the rights of children;

(b) Consistent with article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 11/ take measures to ensure that a child is registered immediately after birth and has the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents;

(c) Take steps to ensure that children receive appropriate financial support from their parents, by, among other measures, enforcing childsupport laws;

(d) Eliminate the injustice and obstacles in relation to inheritance faced by the girl child so that all children may enjoy their rights without discrimination, by, inter alia, enacting, as appropriate, and enforcing legislation that guarantees equal right to succession and ensures equal right to inherit, regardless of the sex of the child;

(e) Enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is only entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses; in addition, enact and strictly enforce laws

concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age for marriage and raise the minimum age for marriage where necessary;

(f) Develop and implement comprehensive policies, plans of action and programmes for the survival, protection, development and advancement of the girl child to promote and protect the full enjoyment of her human rights and to ensure equal opportunities for girls; these plans should form an integral part of the total development process;

(g) Ensure the disaggregation by sex and age of all data related to children in the health, education and other sectors in order to include a gender perspective in planning, implementation and monitoring of such programmes.

275. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Disaggregate information and data on children by sex and age, undertake research on the situation of girls and integrate, as appropriate, the results in the formulation of policies, programmes and decision-making for the advancement of the girl child;

(b) Generate social support for the enforcement of laws on the minimum legal age for marriage, in particular by providing educational opportunities for girls.

Strategic objective L.2. Eliminate negative cultural attitudes
and practices against girls

Actions to be taken

276. By Governments:

(a) Encourage and support, as appropriate, non-governmental organizations and community based organizations in their efforts to promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls;

(b) Set up educational programmes and develop teaching materials and textbooks that will sensitize and inform adults about the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices on girlchildren;

(c) Develop and adopt curricula, teaching materials and textbooks to improve the self-image, lives and work opportunities of girls, particularly in areas where women have traditionally been underrepresented, such as mathematics, science and technology;

(d) Take steps so that tradition and religion and their expressions are not a basis for discrimination against girls.

277. By Governments and, as appropriate, international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Promote an educational setting that eliminates all barriers that impede the schooling of married and/or pregnant girls and young mothers, including, as appropriate, affordable and physically accessible child-care facilities and parental education to encourage those who have responsibilities for the care of their children and siblings during their school years to return to, or continue with, and complete schooling;

(b) Encourage educational institutions and the media to adopt and project balanced and non-stereotyped images of girls and boys, and work to eliminate child pornography and degrading and violent portrayals of the girl child;

(c) Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices such as prenatal sex selection and female infanticide; this is often compounded by the increasing use of technologies to determine foetal sex, resulting in abortion of female foetuses;

(d) Develop policies and programmes, giving priority to formal and informal education programmes that support girls and enable them to acquire knowledge, develop self-esteem and take responsibility for their own lives; and place special focus on programmes to educate women and men, especially parents, on the importance of girls' physical and mental health and well-being, including the elimination of discrimination against girls in food allocation, early marriage, violence against girls, female genital mutilation, child prostitution, sexual abuse, rape and incest.

Strategic objective L.3. Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential

Actions to be taken

278. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Generate awareness of the disadvantaged situation of girls among policy makers, planners, administrators and implementors at all levels, as well as within households and communities;

(b) Make the girl child, particularly the girl child in difficult circumstances, aware of her own potential, educate her about the rights guaranteed to her under all international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, legislation enacted for her and the various measures undertaken by both governmental and non-governmental organizations working to improve her status;

(c) Educate women, men, girls and boys to promote girls' status and encourage them to work towards mutual respect and equal partnership between girls and boys;

(d) Facilitate the equal provision of appropriate services and devices to girls with disabilities and provide their families with related support services, as appropriate.

Strategic objective L.4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training

Actions to be taken

279. By Governments:

(a) Ensure universal and equal access to and completion of primary education by all children and eliminate the existing gap between girls and boys, as stipulated in article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; 11/ similarly, ensure equal access to

secondary education by the year 2005 and equal access to higher education, including vocational and technical education, for all girls and boys, including the disadvantaged and gifted;

(b) Take steps to integrate functional literacy and numeracy programmes, particularly for out-of-school girls in development programmes;

(c) Promote human rights education in educational programmes and include in human rights education the fact that the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights;

(d) Increase enrolment and improve retention rates of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources and by enlisting the support of the community and parents through campaigns and flexible school schedules, incentives, scholarships, access programmes for out-of-school girls and other measures;

(e) Develop training programmes and materials for teachers and educators, raising awareness about their own role in the educational process, with a view to providing them with effective strategies for gendersensitive teaching;

(f) Take actions to ensure that female teachers and professors have the same possibilities and status as male teachers and professors.

280. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Provide education and skills training to increase girls' opportunities for employment and access to decision-making processes;

(b) Provide education to increase girls' knowledge and skills related to the functioning of economic, financial and political systems;

(c) Ensure access to appropriate education and skills-training for girl children with disabilities for their full participation in life;

(d) Promote the full and equal participation of girls in extracurricular activities, such as sports, drama and cultural activities.

Strategic objective L.5. Eliminate discrimination against girls
in health and nutrition

Actions to be taken

281. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Provide public information on the removal of discriminatory practices against girls in food allocation, nutrition and access to health services;

(b) Sensitize the girl child, parents, teachers and society concerning good general health and nutrition and raise awareness of the health dangers and other problems connected with early pregnancies;

(c) Strengthen and reorient health education and health services, particularly primary health care programmes, including sexual and reproductive health, and design quality health programmes that meet the physical and mental needs of girls and that attend to the needs of young, expectant and nursing mothers;

(d) Establish peer education and outreach programmes with a view to strengthening individual and collective action to reduce the vulnerability of girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as agreed to in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and as established in the report of that Conference, recognizing the parental roles referred to in paragraph 267 of the present Platform for Action;

(e) Ensure education and dissemination of information to girls, especially adolescent girls, regarding the physiology of reproduction, reproductive and sexual health, as agreed to in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and as established in the report of that Conference, responsible family planning practice, family life, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection and AIDS prevention, recognizing the parental roles referred to in paragraph 267;

(f) Include health and nutritional training as an integral part of literacy programmes and school curricula starting at the primary level for the benefit of the girl child;

(g) Emphasize the role and responsibility of adolescents in sexual and reproductive health and behaviour through the provision of appropriate services and counselling, as discussed in paragraph 267;

(h) Develop information and training programmes for health planners and implementors on the special health needs of the girl child;

(i) Take all the appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children, as stipulated in article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. 11/

Strategic objective L.6. Eliminate the economic exploitation
of child labour and protect young
girls at work

Actions to be taken

282. By Governments:

(a) In conformity with article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 11/ protect children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development;

(b) Define a minimum age for a child's admission to employment in national legislation, in conformity with existing international labour standards and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including girls in all sectors of activity;

(c) Protect young girls at work, inter alia, through:

(i) A minimum age or ages for admission to employment;

(ii) Strict monitoring of work conditions (respect for work time, prohibition of work by children not provided for by national legislation, and monitoring of hygiene and health conditions at work);

(iii) Application of social security coverage;

(iv) Establishment of continuous training and education;

(d) Strengthen, where necessary, legislation governing the work of children and provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure effective enforcement of the legislation;

(e) Use existing international labour standards, including, as appropriate, ILO standards for the protection of working children, to guide the formulation of national labour legislation and policies.

Strategic objective L.7. Eradicate violence against
the girl child

Actions to be taken

283. By Governments and, as appropriate, international and non-governmental organizations:

(a) Take effective actions and measures to enact and enforce legislation to protect the safety and security of girls from all forms of violence at work, including training programmes and support programmes, and take measures to eliminate incidents of sexual harassment of girls in educational and other institutions;

(b) Take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the girl child, in the household and in society, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse;

(c) Undertake gender sensitization training for those involved in healing and rehabilitation and other assistance programmes for girls who are victims of violence and promote programmes of information, support and training for such girls;

(d) Enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, genital mutilation, incest, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and child pornography, and develop age-appropriate safe and confidential programmes and medical, social and psychological support services to assist girls who are subjected to violence.

Strategic objective L.8. Promote the girl child's awareness
of and participation in social,
economic and political life

Actions to be taken

284. By Governments and international and non-governmental organizations:

- (a) Provide access for girls to training, information and the media on social, cultural, economic and political issues and enable them to articulate their views;
- (b) Support non-governmental organizations, in particular youth non-governmental organizations, in their efforts to promote the equality and participation of girls in society.

Strategic objective L.9. Strengthen the role of the family* in improving the status of the girl child

Actions to be taken

285. By Governments, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations:

- (a) Formulate policies and programmes to help the family, as defined in paragraph 29 above, in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles, with particular emphasis on the elimination of intra-family discrimination against the girl child;
- (b) Provide an environment conducive to the strengthening of the family, as defined in paragraph 29 above, with a view to providing supportive and preventive measures which protect, respect and promote the potential of the girl child;
- (c) Educate and encourage parents and caregivers to treat girls and boys equally and to ensure shared responsibilities between girls and boys in the family, as defined in paragraph 29 above.