

QUESTIONNAIRE TO GOVERNMENTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM OF ACTION

Part One

Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

In August 1997 a State Commission on the Development of Gender Policy was established by the decision of the Prime Minister of Armenia. Members of the Commission are Cabinet Ministers, their Deputies, Government officials. NGOs participate in the work of the Commission with an observer status. The Chairperson of the Commission is the Minister of Social Security.

This action is a follow up to the 1994 decision on "protection of women and children, and consolidation of families."

On April 15, 1998, the Government approved the "Basic principles of the Plan of Action for the improvement of the situation of women in Armenia for 1998-2000," which, inter alia, recommends that annual reports be presented on the implementation of the Beijing Program of Action. The implementation of the Plan of Action should involve NGOs, entrepreneurs, trade unions. Local and regional authorities were invited to present action plans on local and regional level.

The Plan of Action is targeted at a wider involvement of women in the different levels of decision making, assistance to female victims of violence, development of social network for teenagers, especially teenager girls, elaboration of proposals aimed at elimination of unemployment among women, creation of better working conditions for women, development of standards of health care for women and girls.

It should be noted that a gender development program, which was elaborated jointly with the UNDP in 1998, is currently frozen. ???

Armenia is still in the first decade of its independence and drastic changes could hardly be expected in such a short time. However, both before and after Beijing, the Government has been committed to the betterment of the situation of women and securing the gender equality. Problems of women

became more clearly articulated in recent years. The number of women's NGOs has significantly increased, the society is becoming more conscious about the gender issue. Although the public perception of the gender roles has not changed much, the public is more cognizant of the necessity to change the existing situation.

The transition to democracy and market economy has had adverse effects of women. These include sharp decline in representation of women in high-level government positions and disproportionate effect of unemployment on women. In addition, cultural stereotypes exist that stress the traditional role of women as mothers in paternalistic way.

Man in the Armenian family has traditionally been head of the household and the main income earner, while the primary role of woman was to bear children and raise the family. Although this tradition was strong, it began to change already under the Soviet system. Contributing to this change was the high level of education attained by women, and the increased participation of women in the economic and political activities. In the past decade the difficult economic situation in the country has further increased the role of women in the income generation at the household level.

Yet, the real challenge is changing the mentality, bringing both men and women to the point when they realize that the place of woman in the society is far from being limited to her "noble role as a wife and a mother."

Under the Soviet system women in Armenia enjoyed high level of participation in the economy. This was due in part to the high demand of labor. However, the commitment to equal opportunities for men and women did not go so far as to put women in high decision making positions.

After independence, Armenia began implementing a fundamental economic and political reform. The economy was strained by the changes following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and by transition to market economy. This is true for any other ex-Soviet economy but Armenia had some peculiarities which further aggravated the situation: blockade of main transportation routes imposed by neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan, severe energy crisis, and consequences of devastating earthquake of 1998, with only about 30% of its damage restored. The global economic crisis, especially the collapse of the Russian economy, has had indirect affect on the Armenian economy. The overall economic decline has resulted in a large-scale labor migration and men who had found jobs in Russia and were supporting their families, which had stayed in Armenia, because of the Russian crisis are unable to do so any more. This of course further worsens the situation of women who are now forced to find ways of supporting their families – a task, which is not an easy one given the scale of unemployment in today's Armenia.

Despite certain inaccuracy in the data on unemployment in Armenia, even the existing figures of the registered unemployed show that women make up 71% of the unemployed. These figures, however, are more a reflection of the unemployment registration process than the actual true number of the unemployed.

The earthquake of 1988, the conflict in Nagorno Karabagh, collapse of the Soviet Union, and ensuing economic crisis have all contributed to massive migration movements both within the country and across the national borders. The primary migratory trends during the 1989-1996 were labor migration, refugee flow, and internally displaced persons from the earthquake area and the border regions.

Official migration figures report that 61,700 people have left Armenia between 1992 and 1996. The period of outward migration coincided with the influx of an estimated 350,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya, and Nagorno Karabagh. A 1997 UNHCR survey found that there are currently about 286,000 refugees still living in Armenia.

GDP per capita in 1997 was USD 430.8. This figure, although low in comparison with the rest of the world, is comparable to the average in the former Soviet Union. A poverty assessment survey conducted at the end of 1996 revealed that 54.7% of the population live in poverty.

The low rate of crimes against women is ascribed to under-reporting. Domestic violence is almost unreported for fear of public opinion, because of financial dependence, desire to keep the family together for the sake of the children, or simple fear of public opinion.

Part Two

Financial and institutional measures

The issues under this title are covered in responses to Part One and Three, as well as Annex 1.

Part Three

Implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

The Armenian Constitution provides for equal rights for all citizens, however there is no specific legal provision for the equality between men and women, which is based on the assumption that women's rights are human rights.

"Basic principles of the Plan of Action for the improvement of the situation of women in Armenia for 1998-2000" manifest the decisiveness of the Government to achieve a wider involvement of women in the decision making. However, this document does not specify the mechanisms for achieving such goal.

The transition period provides for implementation of temporary special measures to ensure equal representation of men and women at high positions, which could be achieved through introduction of quotas. The current situation can be illustrated by the following figures:

in the recent parliamentary elections (30/05/1999) only four female deputies were elected, of which only one was elected from a single-mandate precinct and the other three – through party lists. The previous National Assembly had 11 female deputies, 8 of which represented a women's party, which gained less than one percent of votes in the May elections.

There are no female ministers and only three deputy ministers in the newly formed Cabinet.

In the judiciary women occupy 13% of high positions.

Annex 1

I. Women and poverty

Poverty survey is conducted by households and no gender-specific data is available at this stage.

The distribution of Armenia's population by poverty indicators is as follows:

Non-poor	45%
Poor	27%
Very poor	28%

There are several underlying causes for the current poverty levels. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the poverty, although existed, did not affect majority of the population. Health care, utilities, education were provided by the state and the state salary was sufficient to guarantee decent living.

Economic transition brought about drastic changes. Many families lost their savings in early 1990s when banks collapsed and inflation was out of control. Now, despite a growing economy and steady recovery on a macro-economic level, there are no effective mechanisms to assist families out of poverty.

II. Education and training of women

The Armenian Constitution underscores the principle of equality of human rights for all and guarantees the rights to education, access to information and dissemination of information. Education indicators show that women in Armenia have attained a very high level of education, comparable to men and surpassing them at certain levels of and fields of study. In higher education institutions women outnumber men. The literacy rate is around 98%.

However, despite the large number of women professors and assistant professors at the universities there are no women university rectors, the number of deans is extremely small, and only 6 Academician out of 113 are female. This, however, is not an indication of a lower level of education but more of an attitude and the overall gender problem.

The ratio of male and female students in higher education institutions for 1996-1997 was respectively 19,028 and 16,689.

During the recent years school enrollment rates have fallen as compared with previous ones. A 1996 survey showed that 4,6% of children did not attend

school. This data is mostly true for the upper, non-compulsory grades (8-10). The rates for grades 1-8 are much lower. The reasons for absenteeism are diverse, however the major causes are lack of interest in the curriculum, necessity to help the family to generate income, inability of the parents to provide clothing or textbooks.

Although women traditionally prefer to study medicine (90% of medical students are females), paedagogics, or arts, their number tend to significantly increase at the economy, finance, communication, political science and other 'non-traditional' departments. About 90% of Linguistics and 50% of Middle East students are females.

III. Women and health

Assessment of women's health in Armenia is often centered around reproductive health issues. This is partially because many of health problems encountered by women between ages 15 and 49 are, in fact, related to reproductive health.

The reproductive health center established in 1992 and the recently opened mammography center fully meet the highest international requirements and standards and serve not only Armenia but the region as a whole. The services in these centers are costly but there is payment waiver for women from socially vulnerable groups.

Cancer is a dreaded disease but women often see the doctor when the tumor is well advanced. There is no general public health education for women regarding the importance of breast self-exam and yearly gynecological check-ups.

Abortion is a primary method of birth control in Armenia. There is a certain decline of the abortion ratio after 1996 (in 1997, 562 abortions were performed per 1000 live births). This may be a result of the national reproductive health program for family planning launched in 1996.

The life expectancy at birth for females in Armenia has increased over the past decade from 74.7 in 1989 to 77 in 1997.

IV. Violence against women

Although the reported rates of crimes against women are very low, it is generally acknowledged that these crimes are under-reported. There is no special assistance-provided for rape victims, no gender-disaggregated data collected with regards to violence crimes, no mechanisms for increasing the

number of female personnel in the legal and judiciary system, and no psychosocial and health services available for male or female victims of violence.

Below are some figures for 1998

Rape	13
Rape of minor	11
Marriage to minor	37

V. Women and armed conflicts

As a result of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict about 350,000 refugees entered Armenia, which is roughly equivalent to 10% of the population. These were the Armenian population of major Azerbaijani cities, mostly Baku, Kirovabad, and Sumgait who fled after violent massacres. In addition, some of the population of the Armenian regions bordering Azerbaijan had to move to other parts of the country to escape shelling and bombing.

Women, as always, were most victimized during the massacres, they suffered both physical violence and psychological stress.

In 1996, the National Assembly passed the Law on refugees, which allows refugees to acquire Armenian citizenship. However, a large number of refugees fear that the loss of refugee status will deprive them of some privileges, including the dwelling, since many still live in collective housing centers.

At present, refugees are afforded full access to basic health and education services and have equal employment opportunities with the citizens of Armenia. The ones that have not applied for citizenship have two restrictions, they have no right to vote or to be elected into public offices.

The economic and social hardship affecting the whole population has forced some 65,000 refugees to leave the country for better living and employment opportunities. Many of them are males and school-aged children. Left behind are women, elderly and very young children. This has devastating social impact on women. A study is currently underway to assess the impact of male migration on refugee women.

The other major problem refugee women are facing is the fact that most of them have fled from urban areas and have no skills for rural life and labor. Yet, many of them have found shelter in rural areas and had to acquire appropriate skills and overcome the difficult transition.

VI. Women and the economy

The Government has enacted legislation aimed at achieving gender equity and protection of women within the work setting. Laws regarding gender equality include guarantees for equal consideration for promotion, equal pay, and equal choice of profession without discrimination. Protection measures for pregnant women, mothers and families include paid maternity leave, guaranteed employment and earnings, creation of special work conditions for pregnant and breast-feeding women. These measure may have adverse effect, since employees are bound to resist hiring or promoting women if it results in additional expenses from birth allowances, paid leave, or provision of special facilities.

Unemployment is difficult to measure in Armenia. Women comprise 70% of the registered unemployed, although there are possibly more unregistered male unemployed but apparently women are more willing to register. Voluntary unemployment has become widespread in the recent years, women preferring to quit the job and engage in business and petty trade.

Women and men enjoy equal rights for real estate and other property. In 1991-1992 during the land reform, land was distributed between households, regardless the gender of the had of the household. Family and Marriage Code guarantees equal rights for spouses for jointly earned property.

Solid legislative basis is encouraging, however actual practice is difficult to assess because of the paucity of gender-specific information. ✓

VII. Women in power and decision making

Armenian legislation, including the Constitution, provides equal rights for the participation in the public life and the decision-making. Yet, at this moment women are not involved in the process at the extent desired.

The percentage of women in decision making positions at the Office of the President, the staff of the Cabinet, and the Foreign Ministry is as low as 12.5. The situation in the judiciary and the legislative is similar to that in the executive: women comprise 13% of judges and 6.3% of the local administration officials.

VIII. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

In August 1997, a State Commission on the Development of Gender Policy was established by the decision of the Prime Minister of Armenia. Members of the Commission are Cabinet Ministers, their Deputies, Government officials. NGOs participate in the work of the Commission with an observer status. The Chairperson of the Commission is the Minister of Social Security. The Commission, in fact, has a consultative status and does not have a decision making power.

IX. Human rights of women

Armenia ratified the CEDAW on June 9, 1993 and presented its initial report in 1997.

More than 40 registered NGOs deal specifically with the rights of women and different areas of concern in this respect. Although most of these do not have "women's rights" in their titles but they concentrate on various issues affecting rights of women and gender issues.

Armenian legislation provides the necessary legal framework to guarantee the equal rights of men and women. However, cultural stereotypes exist which stress the traditional role of women in the society and hence impede the promotion of their rights.

X. Women and the media

The number of female journalists is very high. But most of them do not specialize on gender issues.

Gender issues and specifically women's rights are not sufficiently covered in the media, be it printed or broadcast one.

XII. The girl child

There is no specific policy targeted at girl children. The activities of the Government and civil society are aimed at children as a whole, without gender restrictions. This regards also access to health care and social facilities for children.

Boys and girls are brought up in most of the families in such a way as to realize the gender identity. Which does not suppose that girl child is discriminated against in the family, girls are brought up to be the foundation of the family and boys are prepared for the public life. There is a difference in the situation of girls in urban and rural areas. The girls in the latter work earlier and harder than the girls in towns, equally with other members of the family.

The Armenian Constitution underscores the principle of equal right for education. In 1997 the girls comprised around 80% of school students. (See also Point II of the present Annex)