

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
New York, 1-12 March 2010**

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE

**The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,
the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General
Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards
the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

Written Statement *

Keynote Speech by

**Lydia Alpízar Durán
Executive Director
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)**

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

We dreamt that the daily life of every woman and girl would be radically transformed; that girls in the future would be born in a world full of opportunities where they could learn and grow; that every woman could love in any way she wanted and lead a life free from all forms of violence and oppression, with access to education, health care, decent work, and decision making at all levels. These dreams were put on paper and became global agreements that we expected would be translated into reality. In Beijing fifteen years ago, we knew that we were making history together, because we were pushing the boundaries of what had been possible, and we were building a global consensus to advance gender equality and women's rights that would serve as a blueprint for all the work ahead. This annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a very special one, as we commemorate and celebrate fifteen years since the groundbreaking United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. As someone who joined the women's movement in the midst of the Beijing preparations as a youth activist, it is an honor to share with you all some reflections, analysis and recommendations as a feminist and a proud member of the historic global women's movements.

The UN Secretary-General's Report prepared as a background document for this CSW session¹ provides a very comprehensive review of achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as some recommendations. It states that there have been limited or uneven achievements (across regions and within countries) and very limited state accountability to the commitments made in Beijing. Achievements have been mostly concentrated in the formal spheres (laws, policies, programs, mechanisms), and have not really translated into significant sustained changes in the lives of women.

Moreover, progress achieved in the last fifteen years is very fragile. In times of systemic crisis like the one faced today (economic, environmental, food, energy, social, work and care crises), progress made on gender equality and women's rights is the first to be eroded. Examples of the losses sustained, and that may continue into the future, include the significantly increased rates of women's unemployment in some areas such as export processing zones in the Philippines, India, Mexico; increased violence against women as a result of the financial crisis in the USA, seen in some surveys indicating that 75% of women's shelters reported an increase in cases attended since the beginning of the financial crisis; and increased malnutrition and hunger among women and girls.²

My intervention is organized in four sections. First, I will discuss the importance of focusing these deliberations on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and going beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); second, I will present some key insights from the work advancing women's rights and gender equality over the last fifteen years. Third, I will review some relevant current trends to be considered in our deliberations here over the next two weeks; and finally, I will present some action-oriented recommendations.

¹ E/2010/4-E/CN.6/2010/2.

² For more information see: Sub-regional Briefs Series on the impact of the crisis on women's rights, AWID (2009-2010), available at: <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-News/Brief-Series-Impact-of-the-crisis-on-women-sub-regional-perspectives>

1. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: going beyond the MDGs

While the MDGs are an important tool to advance gender equality and women's rights, the deliberations of this CSW session should focus primarily on advancing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action as a whole. Like many others, I have a critical perspective on the MDGs, even though they are important goals and it is useful to have a set of concrete targets, they reduced a more comprehensive agenda that was advanced in the various UN Conferences and Summits of the nineties (including Beijing). Diverse stakeholders have noted the limitations of the MDGs, and expressed concern and disappointment with the fact that most of the MDGs will likely not be achieved by 2015. Even with the addition of new targets in recent years related to gender equality, the goals continue having important gaps, for example the absence of a concrete target and indicators on eradicating violence against women.

Therefore, the deliberations on progress toward the MDGs must include strategies to continue advancing the BPfA, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other relevant international agreements related to gender equality and women's rights. It is clear that without advancing the BPfA as a whole, the achievement of the MDGs will not be possible.

2. Some insights gained over these last 15 years

a) There are no 'magic bullets' to achieve gender equality and women's rights. Even with so much accumulated evidence and knowledge of the complexity of the oppression and discrimination experienced by women, the belief prevails that there can be 'magic bullets' or 'shortcuts' to achieve gender equality and women's rights. Some examples of the 'magic bullets' mentioned in different parts of the Secretary-General's report are: gender mainstreaming, micro-finance and quotas for women in formal political systems. As many feminist colleagues have affirmed, these interventions are all good ideas; indeed, they came from the advocacy done by women's movements, but they have been divested of the complex transformative strategies within which they were originally embedded and reduced to formulas, rituals and mantras.

As feminist scholar/activist Srilatha Batliwala has stated, "there is growing evidence from research and grassroots experiences that mechanical and depoliticised implementation of these strategies ensures that none of these, singly or together, necessarily empower women. More importantly, these strategies have, in many contexts, merely shifted greater responsibility and burden for economic survival and political change onto women themselves, or ended up as a numbers game. These strategies create important enabling conditions, or the 'push' factor, for gender justice from above, but they are only one part of a much larger process."³

³ Batliwala, Srilatha (2007), 'Walk Beside Us', Intervention at the High-level Thematic Debate on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment held by the United Nations General Assembly, March 6, 2007.

b) Strengthening different dimensions of women's autonomy is needed to advance women's rights and gender equality: The distorted, fragmented or limited implementation of diverse approaches these last fifteen years has reinforced the lesson that policies, norms, and strategies for women's empowerment must take into account at least the following five dimensions:

- Women's economic autonomy: not only stopping the feminization of poverty or working to eradicate poverty, but transforming macroeconomics and economic structures, building equality and social justice and ensuring that women have access and control of economic resources.
- Women's political autonomy and full citizenship: working for parity of participation at all levels, and ensuring women's participation across the broad spectrum of formal and informal decision-making institutions and spaces as a reality and not just a quota aspiration; further ensuring that that participation contributes to advance women's rights and gender equality is central to building democracy and ensure women's full citizenship.
- Women's freedom from all forms of violence: whether perpetuated by state-sponsored actors, private actors or by a family member, violence remains one of the most pervasive barriers to women's full enjoyment of their rights. Any effective intervention needs to address violence and advance its eradication.
- Women's sexual autonomy: women must have the freedom to decide how they want to live their sexuality without risk of violence and discrimination. Even with so much knowledge and evidence of how sexuality is so central to the lives of human beings, there is still limited recognition of the relevance of women's sexuality, and sexual rights in relation to all other spheres of development and human rights.
- Women's reproductive autonomy: without reproductive freedom and the proper supports for it (universal access to quality health services, the decriminalization of abortion), the full range of women's human rights cannot be advanced.

c) Women and women's organizing play an important role. Women are engaged in some of the most important innovations and creative interventions to advance women's rights and gender equality. There are numerous examples of the ways in which women's organizations and movements, from the very grassroots to the international level, have been driving forces to advance women's empowerment around the world. And all of this is being done with very limited resources (as AWID research has shown) and in many cases under very repressive situations.

d) The UN has a very limited capacity to accomplish its mandate. Regrettably, the UN still does not have adequate resources, institutional mechanisms and capacity to play the role that member states mandated it to play, as a champion for women's rights and gender equality, to support the implementation of the BPfA and other relevant international agreements. The UN needs to go beyond provision of technical advice, gender-mainstreaming, norm-setting and limited operational support, to have a strong country-level presence and operational capacity and with stronger effective mechanisms for holding states accountable to their commitments. The initial resolution to create the new UN gender entity is a positive step in this direction.

e) Deeper structural changes are needed. We have learned the limitations of the current economic and development model. Commitments included in the BPfA, and even the MDGs, will not be achieved in a market-oriented economy, with a development model that gives priority to economic and financial indicators over the achievement of real development for all people, gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability. Alternatives to this model are essential, building on the amazing work being done by grassroots women, by feminist economists and social movements in different parts of the world to respond to the current times.

3. Current trends and challenges

I would like to name some of the current trends and challenges that impact the struggle to advance women's rights and gender equality, and that should be taken into account when analyzing the current moment and strategizing for future action:

1. The financial crisis and economic recession: This trend is mentioned in the SG report and by now is clear that most responses to the crisis have been gender-blind and therefore not effective in mitigating the effects of the crisis on women. It is key to ensure that responses to the crisis incorporate a clear analysis of its impact on women and are gender-sensitive, taking into account different dimensions, but particularly, the reproductive economy. As Ruth Pearson has pointed "This involves looking at the ways in which women and men in poverty struggle to survive day-to-day, at the different roles and responsibilities that each sex has in the context of care and support of the family, and at the impact the crisis has on their ability to do this".⁴

2. Increased social insecurity and violence in diverse settings: In the last few years, militarism as an ideology and a practice for dealing with social problems has gained incredible strength and spread all over the world both in areas of active conflict and elsewhere, in part bolstered by the so-called 'war on terror'. The significant increase in military expenditures by rich and poor countries alike is a testament to the increasing legitimization and use of force by the state, yet we have also seen state power being seriously challenged or undermined by diverse forms of criminal networks and illegal private actors in different regions. From drug-dealers, to human traffickers, to traffickers of organs or weapons, to private militia, they are all common realities in many territories where the state is no longer the actual ruling power. The military or privatized military companies are increasingly playing former public security roles as the state role in governance is weakening.

The use of public force and violations of human rights are legitimized as forms of control of criminals and for the sake of public safety and security. Conservative civil society groups have emerged, promoting a militaristic and criminalist response to public insecurity, endorsing the use of torture and the restriction of civil and political freedoms thereby undermining human rights. Women are in the spot of this rising violence, evidenced by the aggravation of existing forms of violence against women as well as the

⁴ *Gender Perspectives on the Global Economic Crisis*, Oxfam International Discussion Paper, February 2010, p. 4.

appearance and rapid growth of new forms of violence such as the femicides witnessed in Guatemala and Mexico, which for the most part remain in impunity. This violence must be addressed and requires new strategies and responses.

3. Religious fundamentalisms are on the rise. A clear trend we have experienced in the last fifteen years is the increased presence and power of religious fundamentalist actors from different religions that are opposed to women's human rights. Examples of their impact range from bombings of girls' schools, to so-called honor crimes, to the murder of abortion providers in the USA, and of course to the blurring of the separation between church and state that we witness in many secular states.

Religion and spirituality are important for many people around the world and can enrich the lives of people and communities as well as serve as a positive force for social justice and human rights. Religious leaders from different faiths have campaigned against violence against women, fought stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS and advanced other rights agendas. But the political manipulation of religion or culture to promote intolerance, violence, and justify violations of human rights should not be accepted. A significant part of the work that women's rights advocates have had to do in recent years has been to defend what was won in the conferences of the nineties against religious fundamentalist attacks on women and women's rights. No significant progress can be made on these agendas unless clear measures are put in place to ensure the full respect of the universality of women's human rights by all actors, including religious institutions from all faiths.

4. Women's human rights defenders are increasingly under attack and at risk. They have played a crucial role in the defense and promotion of women's human rights. However, in the context of the current backlash against human rights, women's human rights defenders (both men and women defending women's rights as well as the rights of Lesbian, Gays, Transgenders, Bisexuals, Transexuals and Intersex (LGBTIs) have faced increasing threats and attacks not only from state agents, but from private actors such as powerful conservative forces and fundamentalist armed groups. Since the establishment of the mandate of the UN Special Representative/Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in 2000 until 2007, the office acted on more than 2,276 urgent appeals from human rights defenders, 22% of which involved women. This is not including the countless number of cases that go unreported.

5. Climate change and the frequency of so-called 'natural disasters' are having an enormous impact on women. The last fifteen years have numerous examples—tsunamis, hurricanes and others. And of course in just the last month, with the devastating earthquakes in Haiti and a few days ago in Chile, there is an undeniable urgency to address issues these disasters which generate terrible humanitarian crises and affect women in very particular ways. There is a need to advance research and action that gives visibility to the impact of environmental issues on women and to document and give visibility to the initiatives that women and women's organizations have been using as alternative responses to these problems in different parts of the world. We must ensure

that women have access to all relevant arenas where key decisions on these issues are being made.

6. A new discourse on women and girls as ‘agents of change’ and ‘economic actors’ seems to be emerging in mainstream media and other institutions: building on previous work launched in 2007 by the World Bank as part of their Gender Action Plan, and commonly known as ‘Gender Equality as Smart Economics’, there have been several mainstream media and institutions that in the last few months have produced diverse types of information (videos, books, magazines) or taken action (launching programs or projects, giving awards, etc.). These initiatives have recognized women’s central role in the economy and development, including their economic capacity and agency (women as the ‘largest emerging market of the world’ in the next five years), as well as noted their changing role in society. Different mainstream media, in North America and Western Europe in particular are recognizing and giving visibility to women’s role in society, particularly in relationship to the economy.

This increased coverage represents an important change in the discourse and image of women (traditionally presented as victims in need of protection or rescue), but some challenges as well in terms of how women get instrumentalized from neoliberal perspectives that are now finally interested in recognizing women’s economic contribution and power (and in taking advantage of women’s increasing purchasing power in some countries), in service of the current financial and economic system. These perspectives are not challenging the foundations of the economic development model and the de-regulated financial system that generated the current systemic crisis and in many cases promote the ‘magic bullet’ approaches mentioned above.

7. The feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic: In its first study of women's health released last year, the World Health Organization noted that the AIDS virus is the leading cause of death and disease among women between the ages of 15 and 44. In every region of the world, more women are living with HIV than ever before, and in many of the world’s most affected regions, women are increasingly at risk. In sub-Saharan Africa, 61% of adults living with HIV are female. In the US, women represent 27% of AIDS diagnoses, up from 8% in 1985. Moreover, violence can be both a cause and a consequence of HIV infection. Women report not obtaining an HIV test, not disclosing test results, or not requesting that their partners be tested, use condoms, or remain faithful for fear of violence. And despite great investments in prevention, treatment, care and support, there is numerous evidence that the AIDS response continues to fail women and girls.

In order to place women at the center of the AIDS response, it is imperative that governments implement the UNAIDS “Accelerated Agenda for Country Action on Women, Girls, Gender Equality, and HIV”, an Operational Plan for governments, the UN system, and civil society alike, that encourages specific interventions which will meet the needs of women and girls in regards to HIV. In this regard, appropriate resources and mechanisms should be put in place that: consider the special needs, contributions and conditions of women all over the world for education and counseling, multi-sectoral care

and support services, and health services, including medicines, that will prevent the transmission of HIV; support persons living with HIV, their families and those who care for them, in living longer with HIV and slowing the onset of AIDS related-illness; help AIDS-affected families in mitigating the effects of the illness and death on their own households and communities.

4. Some recommendations for the road ahead

In the spirit of on-going engagement with the UN and with governments, which has been the basis of agreements achieved in different women's world conferences, I would like to present the following recommendations to advance the implementation of the BPfA and therefore, contribute to the achievement of the MDGs.

a) Ensure protection and support for women's human rights defenders: Considering the increasing danger that women's human rights defenders face in their activism, their needs must be addressed in policy considerations and resources for the continued implementation of the BPfA and MDG3. This includes special allocations to set up and support gender-responsive mechanisms for the security and protection of women human rights defenders, as well as sustaining funding for women's organizations and their movements, and ensuring that funding policies and requirements facilitate access for smaller women's organizations to continue their advocacy on women's human rights in a safe and secure manner.

b) Defining clear funding targets for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-related dimensions of all MDGs: Clearly, the lack of financial resources is one of the key obstacles to advance the implementation of the BPfA and the achievement of the MDGs both by governments and civil society. In the upcoming MDG+10 Review Summit, we should advocate for the definition of a clear target and the respective indicators to advance women's rights and gender equality, as part of MDG8. There have been some costing exercises in the past that estimate the resources needed to achieve MDG3 and MDG5 (for example the one just done by UNFPA with the Guttmacher Institute and another published in 2006 by the World Bank). We need updated costing information for all the gender dimensions of the different MDGs (as linked with the BPfA) and we need an approximate target of total resources required per year to make sustainable progress in the relevant areas, in the same way that other targets and indicators have been defined and agreed to by governments.

A percentage of all annual Official Development Assistance (ODA) from developed and developing countries should be allocated specifically for women's rights and gender equality as a sector (in addition to resources for gender mainstreaming and other cross-cutting work). This means continuing to pressure donor countries to achieve the target of 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) for ODA, but also supporting creative alternatives to make resources available for the struggle to eradicate poverty and inequality, such as the International Financial Transaction Tax (IFTT), proposed by civil society organizations in the framework of the financing for development deliberations and currently supported by several countries. We can no longer accept assertions that 'there

are not enough resources to fund the advancement of gender equality'. When the political will exists, governments and other relevant stakeholders are able to mobilize trillions of dollars to rescue finance and banking institutions. We need that same level of political commitment to invest the needed resources in social development, in human rights, in gender equality and in environmental sustainability.

The CSW should therefore consider appointing a Committee of Experts to prepare an updated cost analysis for the achievement of all of the MDGs from a gender equality perspective, building on existing work in this area. The Committee could prepare concrete recommendations to be considered at the MDG+10 Summit later this year.

Mechanisms for disbursing funding for gender equality and women's rights should build on existing experiences and lessons learned. The MDG3 Fund of the Dutch Government, and the Fund for Gender Equality managed by UNIFEM and established with funding from the Spanish Government are two examples of funding modalities that are providing crucial support to civil society groups, in particular women's organizations working at different levels (and in the case of the Fund for Gender Equality, also to governments to advance these agendas). The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is another potential model from which to learn and adapt. It is important to ensure that resources reach a broad range of women's groups, from small community-based groups to large international organizations, reflecting diverse voices and experiences of women (indigenous, rural, women with disabilities, sex workers, lesbians, young women, aging women, widows, etc.).

3. Enhance accountability of states and other relevant actors: As UNIFEM stated in its report *Who Answers to Women?*, "the key to ending gender discrimination and structural inequality is accountability. Women must be empowered to hold policy-makers (and other relevant actors) answerable for their promises, and if they fail to deliver, to call for corrective action".⁵ Lack of accountability is a factor in the limited implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and also, the achievement of the MDGs. UNIFEM puts forward a clear framework for accountability from a gender perspective that has important proposals and recommendations, which should be seriously considered in the road ahead. Civil society actors and women's rights organizations in particular, have developed diverse strategies and mechanisms to hold governments, international financial institutions and transnational corporations to account. CEDAW should be kept in the picture as a key framework for women's rights and accountability mechanism.

4. Resolve to fully engage women and gender equality concerns in relief and reconstruction efforts in Haiti. The current situation in Haiti requires a continued strong response from the international community, stretching into the long term. Member governments and international humanitarian aid agencies present at the CSW should commit to actions that will ensure that all future relief, recovery and reconstruction investments declare and adhere to measurable standards of gender equality and ensure that aid is gender-responsive and reaches women on the ground. In the current period of temporary aid distribution and shelter, in the design and distribution of entitlements, and

⁵ UNIFEM (2008), *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009 'Who Answers to Women?'*, p. 15.

in the planning and rebuilding of infrastructure and development programs, implementing actors should establish collaborative processes that are anchored in formal partnerships with Haitian women's groups (particularly local grassroots groups) who are empowered and resourced to take public leadership in the protracted process of reconstruction. The CSW should consider approving a special resolution to this effect during this annual session.

5. Establish a strong, operational, well-resourced UN Gender Entity. The proposed new UN Gender Entity is vital for advancing the implementation of the BPFPA and the achievement of the MDGs. The CSW should make a strong recommendation to the General Assembly that as we know is currently in negotiations to concretize the creation of this entity. To ensure that the UN is properly equipped to play its role as a champion of women's rights around the world, the new UN Gender Entity should have:

- Strong operational capacity on at the country level. Even with the presence of other UN agencies and their important work, we need the new UN gender entity to have strong operational capacity at country-level to support countries in advancing gender equality and women's rights.
- Significant financial resources and financial sustainability in the longer term. The Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign recommends that the agency have an initial annual budget of at least USD 1 billion a year.
- A leader with strong political stature, and clearly demonstrated commitment and passion for women's rights and gender equality, selected through a transparent process and with clear criteria. And that person should be appointed this year.
- Clear mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society, particularly women's organizations and movements at all levels, including in its governance structure.

I would particularly welcome a discussion in the time we have on the content of my recommendations.

Muchas gracias.