

## UN Fifth World Conference on Women

IPB has been asked to join the group of NGOs working for a 5th UN World Conference on Women to be organized in 2015. The decision to potentially organize a 5WCW lies with the governments/members of the UN. There are pros and cons for organizing such a big conference. **Those who are for** see it as a possibility to mobilize broadly on both governmental and civil society level in favour of gender equality in all walks of life. **Those who are against** find that there are enough documents already, the costs are too high, that regional conferences may be more effective, and that the world may have grown more conservative and we therefore risk going backwards.

There is, however, agreement on the need to implement the achievements existing on paper, that the world still has a long way to go before reaching gender equality and equal rights, and that women's potentials are under-utilized, especially in political and economic contexts, and that we need to reach out to a new generation of younger women.

**The IPB Board /Council meeting in Potsdam on Oct. 29-30 expressed its full support to IPB's involvement in a process in support of gender equality, but wanted to hear the opinions of IPB member organisations as to what could be the best way of doing this at the global level: a new world conference, only regional conferences, efficient use of new technology...**

Joining the advocacy group of NGOs would at this stage mean only giving moral and intellectual support. If and when a decision is taken in favour of a 5WCW, IPB should join the group of NGOs lobbying to influence the agenda in the different stages of drafting and preparation, notably to strengthen the peace aspect.

### **NGO initiative**

As of October 2011, 32 NGOs are registered in support of a possible 5th UN World Conference on Women to be organized in 2015. A new website is established: [www.5wwc.org](http://www.5wwc.org) and some thousands of individuals have shown their support and some prominent women are figuring as advisors.

So far there is no information that any country has taken the idea to the UN General Assembly – nor that a country has offered to host the conference. The NGOs lobbying for a 5WCW still hope to have a resolution passed during the General Assembly this year. (*Please see attached concept paper from the initiators.*)

It should also be noted that there is another NGO initiative, emanating primarily from French-speaking communities, called **Millennia 2015** under the auspices e.g. of UNESCO and la Francophonie, working for an Action Plan for women's empowerment. If there is a decision to make a UN world conference, this initiative may have to consider joining.

### **Background UN World Conferences on Women**

The first UN WCW was organized in 1975 in Mexico after strong lobbying by women's groups. The last one was organized in Beijing in 1995. NGOs were active both in the parallel NGO Forums and in the official conferences as part of national delegations. The conferences were prepared through regional conferences. The title and overall theme of all four conferences have been: equality, peace and development. It gives credit to the organisers that they already in 1975 came up with such a comprehensive approach to major world challenges.

In Beijing there was a strong acknowledgement that women's rights and empowerment as well as gender equality is not a "women's issue" only. Gender equality is important to both sexes – and boys

and girls, women and men should have the same rights and be given the same opportunities to develop their potential and take up positions in the family as well as in economic and political life. The **Beijing Platform for Action**, which contains 12 critical areas of concern, therefore insists on approaching the world through gender lenses.

### **UN Women and a possible 5WCW**

If it is decided to organize a 5WCW, it would be the new UN Women that would be the agency within the UN system that would coordinate the work. Such a process may be a boost for the new agency. It is also a way of reaching a new generation of young women. IPB recently met very briefly Michelle Bachelet, the head of UN Women, in Oslo where she launched their latest report: *Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice*. When asked about a possible 5WCW, she gave the impression of being very interested, but had one reservation which has come up repeatedly when discussing this issue and that is the fear that the world since 1995 has grown more fundamentalist and that re-opening the Beijing Platform for Action would risk to take us backwards.

It should not, however, be necessary to open the Platform for discussion, but instead, a new World Conference could concentrate on how to **implement** it. Countries and organizations should report on what works and what are hindering factors, and find strategies for moving forward. The NGOs advocating for a 5WCW speak about "bringing to fruition the goals and aspirations" of the 4WCW. The Arab Spring may also have a positive influence on international work related to gender equality.

Implementation of the different critical areas of concern has naturally also been on the agenda of the meetings in the UN CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) in New York known as Beijing+5, Beijing+10 and Beijing+15. These meetings have, however, been much more restrained in number and importance and have not managed to mobilize as much interest and engagement as did the previous world conferences. A Beijing+20 organized in the same framework is therefore not likely to have the effect of a possible new world conference. It could, however, be possible to consider an event less important in scope than the Beijing conference, but organized by the UN Women in an interested country, and using new communications technology to allow very broad constituencies to participate and to voice concerns and opinions.

### **IPB and a possible 5WCW**

**If IPB joins the group of NGOs lobbying for a 5WCW, IPB should advocate for keeping the integrated theme of equality, development and peace and be willing to take on a lobbying role in relation to the peace part of the agenda.**

The peace part has always been the less developed aspect of the previous world conferences, and dedicated women have had to fight for its proper integration. UNESCO managed to get the then-new concept of a Culture of Peace into the Beijing Platform for Action as the first non-UNESCO document of the UN where it officially appeared. The Beijing Platform for Action did rightly shift focus away from seeing women primarily as victims and more towards strengthening the empowerment of women in all walks of life. When it comes to peace, however, there has been and still is much more attention to women's role and situation in conflict – as well as in post-conflict situations - than using women's capacities for **preventing conflicts from turning violent**. Both **Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security** and **national action plans for the UNSC resolution 1325** have a stronger focus on conflict and post-conflict situations than on peace-building.

IPB has a huge task to argue for the importance of significant disarmament measures and reductions in military budgets and the prevention of violent conflict and war – and women's situation, roles and

potential in this context. The theme: **Equality, development and peace** is also close to the priorities of IPB.

*IB 31/Oct.2011*

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## **Annex**

### **UN FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN - 5WCW - CONCEPT PAPER from the NGO initiators**

#### **Introduction:**

The Fifth World Conference on Women of the United Nations would be the first to be held in the 21st Century, the first since the widespread reach of information and communication technology. The target date for the conference would be 2015, 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The most deeply held beliefs and values of all societies are reflected in their organization of gender relationships. To date there is no country in the world that has achieved total equality between women and men, and these inequalities have an impact in all spheres of activity, be they political, economic or social. Women in all parts of the world suffer from gender inequality manifested mostly in strict division of labour, less access to decision-making positions, fewer opportunities of participation in political life and less value accorded to the roles they play and consequently inequitable gender relations. Barriers confronting the progress of women and obstructing the realization of gender equality in today's world are partly due to the inability to promote change of mindset and attitudes as well as to dismantle the traditional institutional structures that can promote women's equal rights.

#### **Rationale:**

The potential of a Fifth World Conference on Women as a consciousness raising focus is enormous. Development of the next generation of global and local women leaders will grow out of such a conference. Building on and benefiting from the synergy and awareness that grew out of the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, the Fifth Conference would bring current and future women leaders together, creating and mobilizing effective intergenerational leadership. Effectively and creatively prepared, it could be the most influential women's conference ever with simultaneous and interactive conference linkages and access to individuals with opportunity to participate through the internet. A Fifth World Conference on Women would be the first to make widespread use of the internet and associated technologies to bring women's issues and solutions to worldwide attention.

The conference would raise awareness that the planet and humanity need to have women – fifty percent of global population - involved at every level for there to be peace and sustainability in the world. It would provide a platform for voicing the concerns that women and mothers universally have about their children's future and help create the political will necessary to create a world where children, and therefore everyone, would not fear physical or psychological violence, and where there would be better access to food, clean air and water, health, education, housing and other basic services as well as the opportunity to think, speak, create and love in an environment of global understanding and solidarity. A Fifth Conference would energize the global women's movement towards this end.

The Beijing Platform for Action has identified the critically important areas for action at national, regional and global levels. Since then, it is evidenced that new developments have added new and often complex dimensions to these areas challenging the prospects of their full and effective implementation. Conflict, war, civil strife and post-conflict situation have manifested in a widespread and interconnected manner seriously undermining prospects for women's equality and for their due role. Of course, adoption of the UNSCR 1325 in 2000 opens up new opportunities for women in this context. Commitments made in Beijing and subsequent conferences in respect of rural women and girls so that they can enjoy a full range of rights – from property and inheritance, to health, education and freedom from violence – call for much-needed engagement for their full realization. The UN Human Development Report of 2009 identified abused and coerced women as one of the most important vulnerable groups that are victimized in their own families and societies. Violence, trafficking, drugs, migration, environmental degradation including climate change, media bias, low participation in the decision-making process, commercialization, globalization – all have accentuated increasing obstacles to women's equality since Beijing. While the enormous potential of the information and communication technology (ICT) helps interconnection, networking and mobilization of women and assists in their empowerment, the negative dimensions of that opportunity has been a major concern for women. In brief, "strategic interests" such as political participation, freedom from gender based violence, equal access to decent work and equal access to decision -making positions need to be addressed in a holistic manner.

All of the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted after Beijing, require the empowerment and equality of women in order to be implemented. All eight Goals touch essential aspects of women's well-being and, in turn, women's empowerment is critical for achieving the goals.

**Organizational arrangements:**

With the support of its 193 member states, the United Nations General Assembly need to adopt a resolution at its 66th regular session in 2011 to convene 5WCW in 2015. It would ask the UNSG to report by June 2012 the preparatory arrangements and other details needed for successful holding of the conference. An open-ended preparatory body with the active participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) would be suitable for carrying out the needed preparatory work through the support of the UN Women secretariat.

**Civil Society role:**

Advocacy for 5WCW is a grassroots, civil society effort that began in 2002 by women participating in parallel events during the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings. A turning point of NGO support came at the 2011 CSW meetings. The number of civil society organizations signing an online petition supporting 5WCW continues to increase.

New internet conference platforms are drawing thousands of participants where 5WCW is the subject. To be worthwhile and purposeful, consideration of the issues before 5WCW requires active participation of civil society and giving it the opportunity to reach out to public policy level. The power of civil society lies mainly in its connection and reflection of needs and hopes of ordinary women on the ground. Collaboration and partnership between government and civil society is, therefore, of great importance.

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