

**United Nations**  **Nations Unies**

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

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Regional Perspectives in Progress Achieved and Remaining Gaps and  
Challenges in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

#### Background and introduction

It is a privilege for me to address you this afternoon. I am very pleased to see so many longstanding colleagues and friends who have committed themselves to making a difference in women's lives.

Fifteen years ago, many of us gathered in Beijing where we turned the Fourth World Conference on Women into an event that looked at the world through women's eyes, and demanded gender equality. Our hard work led to the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action – the women's empowerment agenda – a concrete and visionary strategy to achieve equality for women.

#### Achievements in the region

As we review progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, let me highlight some of the achievements in the Asia-Pacific region.

The region has made significant progress in improving the lives of millions of women and girls over the past 15 years. The greatest success of the region as a whole has been with freeing more than 350 million people from extreme poverty between 1990 and 2004.

In recognition of women's rights as human rights, all countries in the Asia-Pacific region, except four, have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Fifteen of these ratifications happened in the last 15 years.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this Convention, countries are adopting laws and policies to promote women's rights. For example, at least 27 out of 49 member countries in the Asia-Pacific region already have, or are in the process of developing, national action plans, policies and/or laws to combat violence against women.

Nearly all governments across the region have now established a singular mechanism, such as a Department for Women's Affairs, to advance women's rights.

The region is an early MDG achiever in reducing gender disparities in primary and tertiary education. Some countries have put in place incentives such as conditional cash transfers and stipends to encourage parents to keep girls in schools.

Many governments in the region recognize gender as an important pillar in poverty reduction strategies. Some are even promoting investment in women as "smart economics".

#### Persistent challenges

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite our solid progress over the past 15 years, persistent obstacles and challenges still remain. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for half the world's maternal deaths, with one-quarter of a

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<sup>1</sup> Pacific Island's Forum Secretariat



undertake specific concerted actions to achieve equality for women across the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action.

In addition, member States demonstrated a high level of commitment and strong support for the role of the UN in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women in the region. They specifically requested ESCAP to strengthen its support to gender equality initiatives across the region, including mainstreaming gender in all its own programmes.

ESCAP member States also welcomed the proposed changes in the United Nations gender architecture to support progress on gender equality and women's empowerment at the global level, and noted the need for the new global entity to cooperate closely with ESCAP at the regional level, through, among other things, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, which is convened by ESCAP and comprises over 25 UN regional and subregional entities in Asia-Pacific.

The level of attendance at the Meeting was unprecedented and reflects the commitment of governments, civil society and UN entities to promote gender equality and empowerment of women.

Moving forward in achieving gender equality

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Meeting the challenges I just outlined will continue to be our priority until real progress is made. Unfortunately, we have to tackle those challenges in the context of multiple threats to development. The economic crisis and climate change threaten to reverse gains we have already achieved, particularly the freeing of more than 350 million people from extreme poverty between 1990 and 2004.

Asia-Pacific is home to more than 60 percent of the world's population. Progress in the region, or lack thereof, will therefore have a profound impact on global performance in all areas of development, including the Millennium Development Goals. At ESCAP, we are according highest priority to our work to improve the lives of women, who constitute more than half of the world's women. We stand ready to fully support our member States in this endeavour.

A vital lesson from the decades of campaigning leading up to Beijing, and from the 15 years since, is that one fundamental issue underlies progress in all these areas – power. That is, who makes the decisions, who drives the agenda, and who benefits?

Ensuring that women have full and equal access to decision-making at all levels – from global politics and macro-economic policy making to household management – is ultimately critical to real and sustained progress in all the critical areas of the Beijing Platform of Action.

Women must be legitimate participants in all spheres of public life – as