

**Fifth World Conference on Women and the
2005 CSW Review of the Beijing Platform for Action
Discussions by NGOs at the
47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women,
3-14, March 2003**

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), the Conference of NGOs (CONGO), the European Women's Lobby and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) convened several meetings at the 47th session of the CSW at UN Headquarters in New York from 3 to 14 March, to facilitate a discussion among women from different parts of the world on the question of the ten year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fifth world conference on women. While many different perspectives were raised a consensus was reached on the following:

A fifth World Conference on Women should be held before 2010 (but not in 2005) but its exact timing and form remains to be carefully considered in light of the Beijing+10 assessment in 2005, the results of the ad hoc Working Group established by the General Assembly on conference follow up, the experience of other review processes like Cairo+10, and the political climate in general.

The CSW Beijing + 10 assessment to be done at its regular session in 2005 and any regional reviews that year should be focused on implementation without any text negotiations.

The idea of having a world conference(s) focused on women's issues and women's perspectives organized outside the UN was also discussed and received some support.

Background Information

The Director of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women informed the NGOs at the CSW that there would be a review of implementation of the Beijing Platform by the CSW at its regularly scheduled 49th session in 2005.

Participants were also informed about a UN General Assembly (GA) process to review the "integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow up to the outcomes of the major UN conferences and Summits in the economic and social fields". In its Resolution 57/270, the GA established in January 2003 an ad hoc working group co-chaired by Belgium and Ghana to identify how best to move forward on implementation of existing programs and plans and the specific roles to be played by ECOSOC, and the functional commissions in this regard. The resolution reaffirms that while each conference has its thematic unity, major UN conferences and summits should be reviewed as interlinked and contributing to an integrated framework for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the Millennium summit in 2000. However, the resolution establishes that individual conference outcomes should not be renegotiated in the follow-up phase. All decisions on follow-up to conferences whose ten-year anniversaries are imminent are

pending while the Committee works (GA resolution 57/270). The General Assembly will examine the proposals of the committee at its 2003 session based on a report due in June 2003. The ECOSOC session in Geneva in July of 2003 will also discuss this question and report its recommendations to the General Assembly.

Discussions of a fifth world women's conference and parallel NGO forum have been ongoing among NGOs since the Beijing+5 review in 2000 and in several on-line discussions organized by The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and Women in Development Europe (WIDE), among others. A wide range of views has been aired on the pros and cons of holding a fifth world conference, on the timing of such an event and on its possible objectives. Notably, similar debates are taking place regarding the Cairo+10 process. The outcomes of these processes will be a critical indicator of the effectiveness of such a process in the current political environment as it relates to the question of a fifth world conference on women and attention should be paid to what happens in this process.

Overall the discussions held by the NGOs differentiated between the question of a fifth global conference or summit and parallel NGO forum at some future date, and the review by the CSW at its session in 2005. In addition a number of alternatives were discussed. The following summarizes the main points of these discussions:

Future Fifth UN World Conference/Summit on Women

The majority of women present were in favor of holding a fifth UN world conference on women at some point before 2010. They cited the need to keep up momentum and inspire a new generation of women activists and bring them into the global arena. Also, international conferences represent a critical place where women can demand accountability from their governments. Those questioning the advisability of holding a fifth conference, especially at this time, noted conference fatigue, the lack of implementation resources, and the geo-political climate and backlash which poses a danger of losing ground on these issues.

At the CSW session practical problems with holding a conference in 2005 were also discussed, as the necessary lead-time to prepare for a global UN conference in 2005 is not available. Such a global event requires a minimum of three years to prepare once legislated by the General Assembly. Other obstacles to holding a UN conference as early as 2005 include the moratorium by the General Assembly while awaiting proposals from the ad hoc committee on how to integrate conference review processes and the fact that there has still been limited implementation of the existing recommendations adopted at Beijing.

There was discussion of the timing of a world conference and the importance of choosing an auspicious political moment for such a gathering, but the results were inconclusive. Some suggested 2007 and others no later than 2010. In light of practical and political constraints and recognizing that there was not yet a consensus on holding a fifth world conference, **as an NGO community, it was agreed that we would not push for the conference in 2005. We agreed that NGO discussions should continue on this question of**

timing both online and in various fora and to consider new innovative approaches.

CSW Review of Beijing Platform Implementation in 2005

NGOs at the 47th session were of the view that the review in 2005 "to assess progress and consider new initiatives as appropriate, 10 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and 20 years after the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies" (Political Declaration adopted by the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly in June 2000) **should concentrate on reports on implementation and that there should be no negotiated text.**

The review should be a reporting exercise on implementation with emphasis on best practices and effective strategies being employed by the various actors accountable for implementation. It should focus, for example, on institutional arrangements and legal and administrative procedures employed and look at obstacles to implementation. But none of this should be done in a manner that results in negotiations over written text since this is a process that can open the door to backlash as well as lead to endless hours of unproductive exchange as illustrated in the Beijing + 5 process and by the CSW's inability to come to agreed conclusions in its review of violence against women at this 2003 session. Women's human rights gains in the Beijing Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) were also recently threatened at the regional review of ICPD in Bangkok, Thailand and at the Children Summit in 2002.

Information for the review in 2005 will be based on a questionnaire to Governments and to UN agencies, Funds and Programmes that will be prepared by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). In the past, NGOs have responded by preparing "shadow" reports that are used both nationally and globally. Several questions remain regarding the process of information collection, including the timeline for the questionnaire, which will probably go out in the fall of 2005, the kind of questions it will include and whether NGOs will be consulted both in preparing the questionnaire and in providing responses.

Recognizing that some regional processes are already in place to monitor progress in implementing the Beijing Platform, it was strongly urged that the **"no negotiation of agreed text"** modality be extended to these regional processes as well. As in the past, Governments should be encouraged to hold national consultations with key actors including women's NGOs in preparing national reports.

Alternatives and Innovative Approaches

A number of alternatives to a global UN conference and innovative approaches were discussed. There have been proposals to convene a world meeting of women to which Governments would be invited, e.g. a women's conference on the state of the world. AWID, for example, will host its triennial international conference scheduled for 2005 which could provide a venue to discuss strategies and exchange ideas about Beijing follow-up or plans for a fifth World Conference. The 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress

on Women will take place in 2005 as well. There was discussion of the World Social Forum and its potential as a model or a possible venue for such follow-up discussion; the next Forums are planned for Mumbai (Bombay), India in 2004 and Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2005. There are plans to convene a regional conference of EU countries on the Beijing process in 2005 with parallel NGO events. Some raised concern that alternative events should not undermine the UN process but should instead provide added input that supplements the UN process.

It was also noted that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed upon at the UN in September 2000 as the latest framework for monitoring development progress are being promoted as incorporating integrated review of recommendations made at the global UN conferences of the 90s. But it was also noted with concern that the MDGs do not reflect all of the recommendations made at the conferences - including those on reproductive rights.

In this discussion, questions have been raised about whether and in what ways the women's movement should continue to work with the UN. One point of view emphasizes the notable success women have had in influencing the international agenda and lobbying governments by bringing their concerns and ideas to the UN, including the empowerment this has offered women vis a vis their national governments. Another argues that what is possible now through the UN falls short of expectations and provides a smoke screen for inaction at the country level resulting in a need for more emphasis on activities at the national and local levels and engagement with international institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Still others see the need to transform international institutions, including the UN, to be more responsive to equality demands, and advocate a strategy that would maintain pressure both at national and international levels taking the need for transformation into account. It was also agreed that this discussion needs to continue.

Next Steps

While it was agreed to continue discussions on convening a future global conference on women on-line and elsewhere, strategies and actions are needed to address immediate concerns including:

- Monitor the GA discussion on follow up to world conferences taking place in New York from now until June 2003 when the working group issues recommendations and consider how best to address the review of the implementation of outcomes of major UN conferences and summits;
- Monitor the ECOSOC process on Conference Follow-up in Geneva in July 2003 with the same considerations;
- Meet with the DAW regarding the questionnaire on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to discuss the timetable for its preparation and distribution and to

seek a voice in its formulation as well as to determine how NGOs can provide information on implementation;

- Monitor preparation by Governments of responses to the questionnaire and prepare shadow reports;
- Monitor and participate in regional preparations for the 49th session of CSW in 2005 to ensure no renegotiations of agreed text;
- Discuss alternative formats to renegotiation of agreed text for both advancing implementation and considering new issues;
- Monitor and influence preparation of country reports (submitted to UNDP) on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals to ensure attention to gender in relation to all of the goals;

To aid in the above and for purposes of lobbying governments, the following brief guides may be useful:

Re: 2005 review by CSW: *Ask (Government officials) support for a "no-negotiation" strategy at the review by CSW in 2005 (and in regional reviews) of the implementation of the Beijing Platform and urge that country level consultations with civil society be convened as part of the preparation of national reports on implementation in response to the questionnaire from the UN Division for the Advancement of Women.*

Re: Fifth world conference on women: *Urge Governments and NGOs to continue to explore the possibility of holding a conference between 2007 and 2010.*

Re: Millennium Development Goals: *Urge that in preparing reports on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, attention be paid to how both women and men are being impacted, to the critical role of women in achieving all of the goals, and to ways in which targeting women and girls can expedite their achievement. Offer to assist in gathering key information for these reports.*

Contact Points

Several organizations that participated in these discussions agreed to be contact points for various functions.

Regionally, four organizations volunteered to act as focal points for the continuation of these discussions at the regional level:

Asia Pacific Women's Watch: <apwld@loxinfo.co.th>

European Women's Lobby: Annette Lawson <alawson@enterprise.net> and Cécile

Gréboval <greboval@womenlobby.org>

FEMNET: <femnet@africaonline.co.ke>

Canada – (FAFIA) Feminist Alliance for International Action:
<charlotte.thibault@videotron.ca>

Other regional contact points need to be Identified for Latin America, the Caribbean and West Asia/Middle East etc.

Internationally, the following agreed to the following tasks:

AWID: to continue its on-line discussion on the Beijing +10/fifth World Conference debate (all submissions are available at www.awid.org) with regular postings related to the above recommendations and monitoring required.

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva: will be focal point for July ECOSOC meeting in Geneva. NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva is planning to hold a meeting to discuss this issue where they will invite all the relevant UN agencies and programmes in Geneva. E-mail: congo@ngocongo.org

CWGL, WEDO, CONGO: will monitor proceedings in New York.

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WEDO: wedo@wedo.org

CONGO: congony@ngocongo.org

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