

Working Draft Report of the EMERGING ISSUES workshop at the NGO Forum of the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 10-Year Review of the Beijing Platform For Action

Note that this is not the official NGO Forum submission on Emerging Issues, but the longer report that came from the two day NGO Forum meeting that preceded the ECE government review. The official Emerging Issues paper can be found in the final report from the December 2004 ECE meeting on Beijing 10, where it is included in the NGO Forum annex (see www.unecce.org or the website of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/beijing10/index.html)

INTRODUCTION

The Emerging Issues workshop highlighted issues and critical areas of interest that either were not adequately covered in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the Outcomes Document from the Beijing + 5 Review, and/or have appeared with some level of intensity in the past decade. An overarching concern of the group was the way in which global forces that have intensified over the decade since Beijing have often eroded support for and attention to women's human rights. In particular, the growth of militarism and fundamentalisms of many kinds and the growing inequities produced by globalization were seen as detrimental to the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action. We reject violations of women's human rights justified in the name of "national security" or "national defense" as well as in the name of "cultural heritage" or religion. The global "war on terrorism" should not be used as an excuse to undermine any group's human rights or to neglect the critical issues of women's daily human security. We see multilateralism and multi-stakeholder dialogues as the only way to address global security concerns. Politics of exclusion, domination and military power have failed women in the ECE region. We call upon governments to develop better alternatives for our collective future human security based in respect for all human rights.

The following were identified as critical areas of emerging concern for women at the ECE NGO Forum. The first six topics were covered by sub groups that sought to identify the problem and make recommendations regarding it. Several other areas were identified but not taken up by sub-groups and are listed more briefly at the end of Section I of this report. Section II takes up specific issues of diverse women's constituencies.

SECTION I

1. MILITARISM

The current geopolitical environment is one of violence, military spending, a culture of war on terror as well as increased international transnational crime and corruption. This context of violence is fueled by fundamentalisms and nationalisms and the primary victims are civilians, and in particular women and children. The ECE has both "victims" and agents, including the superpower of the US and other permanent Security Council members: UK, Russia and France. The region also has conflict zones in Chechnya, Balkans, the Caucuses, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS: a) National governments: We reject violence, war, increased military spending the general culture of violence being perpetrated by the war on terror as an ineffective response to acts of terrorism. As civil society organizations, we promote a culture of peace, disarmament, dialogue and

human rights. Obscene military budgets must be reduced and defense spending shifted to poverty reduction, development and the protection of human rights, etc.

b) UN: Implement 1325 through action plan, audit of existing funds, and appoint a Special Rapporteur on 1325

c) UN peacekeeping forces: Include more women, particularly in decision making positions and positions of power. Develop a gender monitoring mechanism and training on local context. End impunity for violence perpetrated by peacekeepers.

d) International organizations: All existing organizations with a mandate to work on organized crime have failed thus far and we need to review their activities, more transparency, full budgets, and public space for discuss and critique their work and mandates.

2. FUNDAMENTALISMS

Women oppose all forms of fundamentalisms because they demonize “the Other”. Fundamentalisms use religion, cultural heritage, nationalism and ethnicity to obtain political power and to control women’s lives. Governments must ensure that civic rights laws are implemented and enforced. The principle of secularity should be respected by each state in all its policies. Governments must refuse all interference of fundamentalisms in education. Secularity respects equally non-belief and belief. We reject the use of tradition and ethnicity to prevent women from enjoying their full reproductive and sexual rights. We reject the increase of military spending in the name of state security to the detriment of health, education and social programs.

3. SEXUAL RIGHTS

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international and regional human rights documents and consensus documents, including the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, their “plus-five” outcome documents, the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment and the work of the UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures;

All women, including young women, have the right to make their own informed choices about all aspects of their sexual lives and reproductive lives, including their sexual pleasure, sexual autonomy and sexual orientation; all women must have access to: comprehensive sexuality education that is not heterosexist; comprehensive and confidential sexual health services and reproductive health services, including to safe and legal abortion; and male and female condoms. All women must have freedom to: establish all forms of families and relationships; and exercise their sexual rights free from gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination, including FGM, forced and early marriage, so-called honour killings and domestic violence.

Governments must immediately develop, implement and enforce the full range of legislation, policies and programs required to respect, protect and fulfil the sexual rights of all women and girls; realise their obligations, including creating the enabling conditions required to ensure that lesbians, bisexual and heterosexual women and girls enjoy the full range of sexual rights, including sexual autonomy and the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

The Secretary General must ensure that the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women requested by the UN General Assembly in 2003 includes specific consideration of the many ways in which gender-based violence violates women's sexual rights, and makes recommendations to governments to respect, protect and fulfil women's sexual rights.

4. HIV/AIDS

Gender equality must be addressed in order to mitigate the feminization of the HIV pandemic. Women's experience must be central to the discussion in relation to access to treatment, the links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS, or any other gendered aspects of the epidemiology of HIV.

HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes must be designed within a human rights framework. Governments have the responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Community participation must be central at all levels. HIV/AIDS strategies must encompass sexual and reproductive health and rights with special attention to young people, particularly young women, through the promotion of comprehensive sexuality education that enables them to make informed decisions.

Female controlled prevention methods such as microbicides and female condoms must be accessible and affordable. Women must be involved in the design and delivery of antiretroviral (ARV) programmes to ensure gender sensitivity. Resources must be allocated to monitor the access of women, young women and girls to ARVs, especially those living in poverty.

5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

ICTs offer immense possibilities for achieving women's rights, eliminating poverty, overcoming women's isolation, giving women a voice, improving governance and advancing gender equality. To ensure participation for women of all ages and cultural backgrounds equally with men, government actions must include: providing education on how to effectively and safely use and shape ICTs; ensuring every woman and girl has the right to communicate freely in safe and secure online spaces; ensuring all ICT initiatives, policies and programs incorporate a gender perspective and indicators to achieve gender equality; making governments accountable for benchmarking and reaching these goals regarding policies and investments; ensuring every woman has the right to affordable access; empowering women of all ages to generate, to own, to develop, to use and to adapt ICTs and content; creating a synergy between old and new ICTs to overcome digital divides within and between societies. The internet can be used to violently exploit women and to produce violent and stereotypical images. Policies and regulatory frameworks to address such use should be developed with all stakeholders, particularly women. However, we should ensure these are not used to enforce censorship and surveillance, or to limit access to information or invade privacy.

6. PUBLIC SERVICES

As NGOs concerned with issues of poverty and social deprivation, we are concerned at the growing tendency in the region towards cuts in public services, deregulation and privatization of services previously provided largely by the state and adversely affecting women. We are convinced that there is an irreducible number of services that the state has a duty to provide, such as water, sanitation, primary health care, including for children and other dependent people, and education.

We therefore recommend that: public services be seen as an instrument of social cohesion, public good and gender equality; the state must remain answerable for the quality of public services and equal access for all; any change of public service provision by the state should be subject to a gender impact assessment; transparency and public debate concerning GATT agreements and negotiations should be ensured. We oppose the shift of costs and workload caused by privatization and cuts in funding from the state to households, which often creates particular hardship for women.

The following two topics were not taken up by sub-groups, but were identified by a number of participants as critical areas of concern:

BIOTECHNOLOGY / NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Ensure that gender equality and women's human rights are supported and guaranteed in the research and implementation of new technologies, including biotechnology, new reproductive technologies and nanotechnology. None of these technologies should impinge on the rights of women and therefore women should be involved in the design and monitoring of these technologies.

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The escalating degradation of the earth requires governments to pay serious attention to the consequences of war and conflict, unrestrained economic growth, depletion of natural resources and pollution of air and water. It is urgent to involve women at all levels of decision-making, of policies of programs, including women specialists, economists and scientists on the full range of environmental issues

SECTION II

The Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcomes Document from the Beijing + 5 Review both have paragraphs in which the diversity of women's experiences and the differential impact of issues on different groups of women is acknowledged. We affirm the need to look at such diversity in seeking to implement the Beijing Platform and call upon governments to affirm the human rights of all women, regardless of whether they are named in such lists. The group affirms the need for attention to all marginalized or oppressed groups of women, and has chosen to look in particular at 7 such constituencies in the ECE region – some of whom are not acknowledged in previous documents and all of whose lives have not been sufficiently addressed. We also note that while these groups are often victimized in ways that require particular attention, they are not only victims but also can be agents whose knowledge and perspectives prove vital to creating new solutions and approaches to issues.

1. Youth

Young people have the right to participate in the design, decision-making, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes in all sectors, not just those identified as being specifically related to youth, and to be compensated appropriately by NGOs and governments for their time and effort. When young people do participate, they must compose a critical mass of at least 20% so as not to further tokenize their involvement.

2. Romany Women

In most of the CEE/CIS countries, Romany women and girls are denied civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. As a result, Romany women and girls live in extreme poverty and face social exclusion and multiple forms of discrimination. We demand state parties mainstream Romany women and girls issues throughout the national strategies on Roman communities and strategies on equality between women and men. Therefore, we demand state parties to allocate specific financial resources for effective implementation of these strategies.

3. Indigenous Women

As reflected in the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Peoples are "equal in dignity and rights to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such". In keeping with the Beijing Platform for Action, Indigenous women's issues must be reaffirmed and included in all discussions and recommendations put forward in all aspects of implementation of the Beijing BPFA and in other emerging areas.

4. Lesbians and Bisexual women

All lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people who identify as women or girls are entitled to the full enjoyment of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

5. Women with disabilities

Recognizing that women with disabilities are subject to multiple forms of discrimination, efforts should be undertaken in order to include and article on the extremely difficult situation of these women into the “draft comprehensive and integral international convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities”

6. Older women

Population aging is a gender issue. Older women outnumber older men across the whole region and particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Well being in later life is directly related to experiences across the life course, therefore the greater disadvantages women face throughout their lives can lead to living their later years in poverty, isolation and poor health.

7. Widows

Due to armed conflict, ethnic cleansing, HIV/AIDS and the reduced life-expectancy of men, particularly in Eastern Europe, the numbers of widows of all ages have risen at unprecedented rates. Changes in political and economic systems in Eastern European countries have negatively impacted widows, their dependents and society at large. Poverty and marginalization of widows requires urgent attention, as their situations can expose them and their children increasingly to violence in all forms, including economic and sexual exploitation. Governments and the international community must address the issues of widows, collect statistics on widows’ experience, provide benefits and services where needed and support widow-related public policy in the ECE region.