



The 2005 World Summit

What's At Stake for Women

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The United Nations has been a galvanizing force for women in the past two decades, facilitating their efforts to define a comprehensive global agenda for peace and human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, and poverty eradication and sustainable development. More than 190 governments have made commitments to this global agenda yet there continues to be a large gap between these promises and implementation at the international and national level.

From September 14th-16th, heads of governments from around the world —the overwhelming majority of whom are men - will meet at the United Nations headquarters in New York for the 2005 World Summit. They will be seeking consensus on a package of proposals linking peace and security, human rights and development with UN reform. Yet the United States threatens this process by seeking last minute, far-reaching amendments that would gut the proposals on sustainable development, debt relief and financial assistance to poor countries, and the environment, and weaken support for agreements on social and economic issues reached at past conferences.

Women have paid considerable attention to this process. What's at stake for women are the promises of equality, empowerment and women's human rights contained in the Women's Treaty (or CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), in the Beijing Platform for Action, Cairo Programme of Action and other widely-endorsed government agreements of the 1990s. The following overview details the critical issues that will be on the table at the World Summit and their importance to women around the world.

A. Development

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for meeting goals

Most governments and international institutions, including the United Nations and the World Bank, agree in principle that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components for achievement of goals in all areas of development, including those contained in the Millennium Development Goals articulated by the UN at the 2000 Millennium Summit. In an effort to create sustainable development, governments must now go beyond words to take action under this framework. At the 2005 World Summit, women want governments to:

- Expand efforts to combat violence against women and girls;
- Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights;



- Assure women's and girls' property, housing, land and inheritance rights;
- Eliminate gender inequality in employment, including the earnings gap;
- Ensure equal representation and participation of women in national and local governments;
- Invest in infrastructure that reduces women's and girls' time burdens, like the amount of time women and girls spend on gathering fuel, water and other basic domestic necessities;
- Expand girls' access to primary as well as secondary education.

These strategic priorities are a subset of priorities governments have already signed on to in previous international agreements. They are the minimum necessary to achieve the crucial goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Human rights-based policies are a critical priority in a global community

The World Summit must address the systemic imbalances in the global economy that leave poor countries more susceptible to increased exploitation by powerful multinational corporations backed by rich countries. These imbalances contribute to the loss of local businesses and jobs, increasing the gap between rich and poor. Governments and international trade and financial institutions must be held responsible for their embrace of current neo-liberal growth-based policies that pay scant regard to social needs. These policies have been particularly disastrous for women as paid employment and social protections have become increasingly insecure, pushing women into informal and often dangerous work, and increasing their unpaid care-giving responsibilities. At the World Summit, women want governments to:

- Acknowledge that neo-liberal economic policies exacerbate poverty and inequity, contributing to human rights abuses that jeopardize human security;
- Adopt a human rights-based approach to policy and planning to achieve the interdependent goals of development, security and human rights.

B. Peace and Security

Women are central to conflict prevention, peacemaking and Peace-building initiatives

Women's groups strongly support the Secretary General's proposal for a new security consensus based on the recognition that all threats are interconnected and require a collective response. Women's groups call for greater focus on human security, conflict prevention and equal participation of women in all decision-making on peace and security issues. At the World Summit, women want governments to:

- Commit to rapid and full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security;
- Take action to ensure greater protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations, and develop accountability and reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence;



- Ensure participation of women at all levels of peace and security decision-making and specifically in the proposed Peace building Commission.

Peacebuilding Commission

The proposal to establish a UN Peace building Commission—to support countries in transition from armed conflict to lasting peace—has received considerable support from governments and civil society, including women’s groups. The Commission could provide the UN system with much needed policy coherence and coordination for peace building. However, to be successful and effective, the Commission would need to draw on the knowledge, networks, and commitment of civil society to peace building and conflict prevention. The mandate of the commission should explicitly commit to partnering with civil society through formal mechanisms at headquarters and at the country level. The details for the Commission’s mandate, composition and reporting lines should to be developed in consultation with member states and civil society, particularly national and grass roots women’s groups.

At the World Summit, women want governments to:

- Mandate the Commission to examine the entire spectrum of conflict rather than limit its work to post-conflict situations;
- Mandate the Commission to work with civil society organizations at the country-level and at the headquarters;
- Allocate predictable and adequate funding for the Commission’s work.

A more democratic and transparent Security Council

For the first time in 40 years, governments are considering Security Council expansion to increase its regional diversity and representation. The main sticking points center on which states should be included and the status of their membership—whether they should have permanent or rotating seats and whether they would be given veto power. There are even questions about the ethics of the veto power itself. Several conflicting proposals on Security Council expansion have been put forward; decision on these proposals will most likely be postponed until after the Summit.

At the World Summit, women want governments to:

- Restrict the veto powers of the permanent five members particularly in relation to genocide and crimes against humanity;
- Implement more democratic working methods for the Security Council based on transparency, accountability and greater collaboration with member states, UN organs and civil society organizations at national and international levels.

C. Human Rights

A Human Rights Council that commands greater authority



Throughout the Summit processes, the framework of human rights has been named as integral to the elimination of poverty and to attaining peace and security. Yet, in many circumstances, this framework is under attack. In order to raise the stature of the human rights system, the Secretary General has recommended that the UN Commission on Human Rights be replaced with a Human Rights Council with higher status and members elected by the General Assembly. If this reform proceeds, women want governments to:

- Protect the considerable advances made by the Commission on Human Rights in expanding the parameters of human rights discussion, especially through the Sub-commission and its special procedures (a system of UN experts and working groups on specific human rights topics);
- Honor developments made by the Commission in areas of particular importance to women such as violence against women, sexual rights, indigenous peoples and minority rights, the rights to education and health, access to medicine and other areas of economic, social and cultural rights;
- Maintain special procedures and resist efforts by some states to narrow the focus of the Council to civil and political rights and “the most egregious abuses” as a means of shifting attention from economic, social and cultural rights or areas of critical importance to women’s human rights;
- Ensure continued, broad civil society participation in the proceedings of the proposed Council.

More resources for human rights reforms and protection of reporting on existing treaties

Women urge governments to increase resources for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and in proposed treaty body reform. Additional resources to the OHCHR would enhance reporting and maintain focus on a range of human rights areas important to women, including social, economic and cultural rights. And although streamlining treaty body reporting could eliminate unnecessary duplication by governments, there is also a risk that states would no longer be held accountable to report on abuses affecting specific groups. In particular women want governments to:

- Ensure that treaty body reform does not jeopardize in-depth reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.

Introduce gender to the “Responsibility to Protect” concept

The World Summit presents the first real opportunity for world leaders to endorse the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), a concept, introduced in 2001 as a response to the UN’s failure to effectively counter mass atrocities in the Balkans and Rwanda. R2P would be brought into play in cases where a state is unwilling or unable to halt or avert genocide or ethnic cleansing, thus overriding the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of a state. NGOs are reluctant to push for any norm that includes provisions, however regulated, for allowing states to use force in the affairs of other states, as they fear this could be used by more powerful nations as an excuse for invading other countries. Women’s groups have expressed concern about the lack of attention



to women's situation in times of conflict, in the current articulations of R2P. If the concept is embraced at the Summit, women want governments to:

- Ensure adoption and implementation includes the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which calls for women to have a prominent role in peace building;
- Ensure the principle of R2P is used in appropriate contexts to protect against genocide and crimes against humanity, and not as a pretense for inappropriate involvement in internal affairs of smaller states.

D. UN Reform

Strengthening the UN requires drastic changes in global governance

A primary goal of the World Summit is to reform the UN system, which in large part remains as it was created in the era immediately following World War II. Women and other civil society groups are greatly disappointed that certain critical components to address the "democracy deficit" in international decision-making are not included. Women also say that, in 2005, it is high time that qualified women be appointed in equal numbers to high-level positions at the UN. At the Summit, women want governments to:

- Take steps to bring the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization under the oversight of the United Nations. As they stand now, these financial and trade institution's power remains unchecked and largely in the hands of the US and Europe, causing a lack accountability, transparency and democracy.
- Address the need for transnational corporations to be held accountable for their operations, since they currently function without adequate systems of regulation or oversight or accountability and are able to disregard global development and human rights norms.
- Address the gender imbalance in the UN Secretariat through a substantial increase in the percentage of women in high-level posts. Make sure women's needs and perspectives inform all policy and programs at the UN, and upgrade the status and resources of women-specific UN entities and offices, such as UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women.