

CEB Statement
to the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of
the adoption of the Beijing Declaration
and Platform for Action

1. We, the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board, recognize the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the opportunity it provides to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls central to development.
2. We reaffirm that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remain top priorities for our organizations in the context of the continuing critical importance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, other international human rights instruments and related intergovernmental outcomes.¹
3. Over the last 20 years, the United Nations system has done much to help translate the Beijing Platform for Action into real improvements in women's and girls' lives. It has put gender equality at the top of organizational priorities, and ensured that a gender perspective is integrated across policies and programmes. To more systematically advance gender equality and women's empowerment, UN-Women was created with a universal mandate to assist Member States through its normative support, coordination and operational activities.
4. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the global political and socio-economic landscape has changed dramatically. Persistent and new conflicts, the world financial and economic crises, the global jobs crisis, a growing digital divide, volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity, environmental degradation, disasters and climate change have intensified inequalities and vulnerabilities, often affecting women and girls disproportionately. Globalization, information and communication technologies, along with demographic changes, including ageing, migration, displacement, and rapid urbanization pose both challenges and opportunities. Fully realizing the human rights of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality calls for mobilizing new actions within an overall environment that upholds sustained progress.
5. Some progress has been made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, but stark gaps remain. On average, gender parity in primary school enrolment has been achieved globally, but wide gender disparities persist in school completion and learning outcomes, especially in secondary and tertiary education in many regions. While women have more employment opportunities today, they are more likely than men to have low-paid and vulnerable jobs, with limited or no social protection. Violence against women and girls is a global scourge, leaving countless women and girls living in fear for their lives. Child marriage violates the rights of many girls, denying them a childhood and leaving them highly vulnerable to violence and abuse, among other consequences. Impunity for all forms of gender-based violence continues at unacceptable levels.
6. Millions of women and girls around the world do not enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example, maternal mortality remains high despite resulting mostly from preventable causes, and still today many are deprived access to sexual and reproductive health services and information in practice. In the context of the current outbreak of the Ebola virus, women and girls are at a heightened risk of infection in light of their roles as caregivers and frontline health workers.

¹ Norms and standards contained and developed under the core international human rights treaties as well as relevant instruments of specialized agencies.

7. Limited access to and control over productive assets and resources worsens poverty among women, including in rural and indigenous peoples' communities. Too few women are heard in the corridors of power and decision-making, while discriminatory laws, policy measures, social norms, harmful practices, stereotypes and exclusion perpetuate inequality.

8. We recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are objectives in their own right. They are also pivotal to sustainable development in its three dimensions - economic, social, and environmental - as emphasized in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want."² Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls are fundamental for eradicating poverty and hunger, attaining peace and security, upholding of human rights and placing development on a sustainable path. Investing in gender equality offers substantial returns to women and girls and to societies more broadly.

9. As leaders of the United Nations system, we therefore urge all governments to reaffirm their political commitment to advance equality, development and peace for all women and girls everywhere and to guarantee their human rights. Specifically, we also urge governments to implement, with adequate resources, the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. It is time to build on achievements, best practices and lessons learned over the past 20 years. Gender-responsive institutions, strong governance and robust accountability, along with policies and measures that promote gender equality, are all required. Women need to play equal and effective roles in decision making to influence policies and hold policy-makers accountable.

10. Looking ahead to post-2015, we underscore the importance of defining a new development and humanitarian agenda firmly grounded in the principles of human rights - universality, indivisibility, equality, non-discrimination, participation, inclusion and accountability. The agenda must be bold and ambitious and foster the transformation of gender relations by tackling the root causes of gender inequality.

11. We are determined to step up efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls under all respective mandates, including through pursuing systematic gender mainstreaming; substantially increasing resources to deliver results, especially under the United Nations development assistance frameworks; monitoring progress with better gender, ethnicity, disability and age disaggregated statistics and data; and instituting robust accountability systems, including through the full implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan. We aim to accelerate progress towards equal representation of women at all levels in its diverse bodies, including through special measures.

12. We pledge to jointly support Member States to fulfil the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, together with the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals. Every woman and every girl should enjoy all her human rights. She should be empowered and free from poverty, hunger, exclusion, discrimination and violence, and possess an equal voice in decision-making.

13. As we aspire to a just world with equality between women and men, boys and girls, the UN system will do its utmost to make this a reality.

² GA resolution 66/288 adopted in the context of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20)