

## **CSO Opening Statement to ESCAP**

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On behalf of the Asia Pacific Beijing +20 CSO Steering Committee and representatives from other CSOs in the Asia Pacific Region.

On behalf of Asia Pacific civil society, we thank ESCAP for the opportunity to speak at this forum. Civil society is committed to advancing and accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action and we welcome opportunities to work collaboratively with governments in our region to ensure that finally happens.

In the last two decades, the world has experienced multiple, interrelated crises of finance, climate, and social and economic inequality. In Asia and the Pacific, inequality and the crippling effects of poverty define the lives of millions of women and prevent their enjoyment of a range of interconnected rights. Indeed, economic inequality between and within countries has reached a level that threatens not only our economies and environment but, according to a recent report funded by NASA, the very future of our civilisation.

As we focus on gender inequality it is imperative that we address the vast inequalities between populations as well as the deeply entrenched patriarchal inequalities that infect all countries. Migrant, Indigenous, rural, urban poor, women living with disabilities, ethnic minorities and women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are most likely to experience marginalisation and a denial of their human rights.

Today, as we reflect on how far we've come in the two decades since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, we have an opportunity to commit to real economic transformation and a fairer distribution of opportunities, power, wealth and resources, as envisaged in the Beijing Platform's 12 critical areas, backed by genuine accountability of governments. Civil society call for a transformed approach to development that delivers Development Justice and includes Redistributive Justice, Economic Justice, Environmental Justice, Gender and Social Justice and Accountability to the peoples.

The current model of development shaped by neoliberal policies combined with retrogressive national and local laws and regulations, and geo-politics escalates fundamentalisms, patriarchal inequalities, that force women and girls to bear the burden of unsustainable economic growth. In addition, increased militarisation, unresolved protracted armed conflicts and the proliferation of arms, interconnected with government and corporate land and natural resource grabbing, drive women and girls out of their homes, making them susceptible to internal displacement and migration, which normalises and exacerbates violence against women and girls.

A major component of the Beijing unfinished agenda is the full realisation of women's human rights to control all aspects of their sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. In public and private spaces, women's and girl's sexual and reproductive health

and rights, including their rights to bodily integrity and autonomy over their bodies and life decisions continue to be violated.

One of the greatest challenges of our time, in the Asia Pacific region is the threat of slow-onset and the episodic impact of climate change, and increasing disasters. For the majority of women and girls it is the loss of our entire homeland and lives.

We therefore must have the necessary transformative global governance systems, incentives, scope and means of implementation to urgently address the rapidly escalating scale and intensity of loss and damage to humans and the planet, including by increasing and ensuring that financial resources and systems work to support the realization of women's human rights and gender across all sectors to achieve gender equality. Public financing must be prioritised over Public-Private Partnerships, especially in relation to the provision of the basic public services like health, water, sanitation, education.

While acknowledging an increased presence of women in decision making processes in some countries of the region we also wish to reiterate that States must be more proactive in ensuring equitable participation of women in all political structures from local to national levels as well as ensure that women's diverse experiences are fully integrated into all peacebuilding, peacemaking, and reconstruction processes.

The dominant development model is reliant on women's unpaid social reproductive labour to cover for cuts in public services, and women's under-paid labour to meet the demands of the care economy, fulfill the requirements of trade agreements, and balance states' economies. States need a gender-sensitive labour policy that is applicable regardless of migrant status and provides for workers to enjoy labour rights that fulfil the ILO core labour standards. This policy should value the essential role of low-wage labour by paying living wages, ensuring access to social protection, and giving migrant workers a path to permanent status.

The intent and ambition of the Beijing Platform is also undermined by a lack of accountability mechanisms. We endorse the intention to make the 20 year review a focus on implementation and accountability and remind governments that the purpose of accountability is to ensure that the most marginalised citizens can hold their government and the most powerful perpetrators of human rights violations, including multi-national corporations, international financial institutions, security forces and other governments, to account.

Accountability requires more than monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Accountability requires remedies. Accountability requires global transformation that ensures the global consensus to deliver human rights is not usurped by the interests of corporations, powerful states or corrupt governments.

To make the Beijing review process meaningful we call on governments and UN ESCAP to promote accountability mechanisms at the international, regional, national and local levels that are powerful and enforceable.

The Beijing review must ensure that governments make specific commitments, developed with civil society, and specify the means of implementation. Those commitments must be cemented through legislation, reviewed by national parliaments and reported to parliaments and constituents annually. Reforms at international level are critical to both ensure governments meet their obligations to provide international solidarity and their extra-territorial obligations.

While our work to implement the Beijing Platform for Action is more urgent than ever, civil society's ability to hold government's accountable is increasingly under fire. Compared to the decade in which the Platform was adopted, the space for civil society to advocate on behalf of women, the marginalised and the most vulnerable in our communities has shrunk, just as the willingness of governments to trade away women's human rights or use them as a bargaining chip has increased. We ask that governments, as required by the Beijing Platform, work directly with civil society in their national reviews and more generally in the implementation of the Platform. Feminist organisations and the women's movement are a critical partner in the path to fulfilling women's human rights, realising gender equality and delivering Development Justice.

Thank you.