

## Human Security for Women

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We can never talk meaningfully about human security without discussing gender equality first. For human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern about human dignity. In the last analysis, it is a concern for people and their welfare. And no society can ever prosper half-liberated and half-chained. Women's security is a pre-condition for human security.

We live today in a culture of violence – and the worst victims of violence are often the women. The cold war has ended, yet the wars and conflicts within regions and countries continue with colossal sufferings, devastation and break-down of family and social harmony. The culture of war and violence, let loose by the ideological differences of the cold war and by economic recession of the eighties, has by now got a life of its own. It has devastated families, traditions and social and economic infrastructure, but its effects have fallen most heavily on women and children.

Women have the greatest stake in peace since they are often the involuntary victims of conflicts. Whether or not they actually participate in conflicts – and most often they do not – they still suffer the most painful wounds of a conflict. They lose their brothers, husbands and sons – and, thereby often their very livelihoods, besides carrying permanent emotional scars. They become an easy prey for the triumphant armies – a callous reward throughout history for the winning side. And even when they stand on the sidelines, thousands of them get raped in the name of 'ethnic cleansing' for the mere crime of being women. Women want peace and security because their absence carries the greatest threat for personal security and for all that they cherish and nurture.

*Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* issued in 1985, states that women from all backgrounds and walks of life have suffered atrocities as a result of war and conflict. They are beaten, mutilated, sexually abused and raped. They are victims of trafficking and involuntary prostitution. Such violence against women, the *Strategy* declares, is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace.

*Amnesty International* reports that aggression against women is carried out by many countries and violations are committed in every geographic region of the world and under every system of government, regardless of ideology. The shocking evidence of the impact of this culture of war and violence on women and children has been captured in many documents from which I list a few facts:

- Most of the conflicts are now within nations, not between nations; and 90 percent of the casualties are civilians, most of whom are women and children. For example, in the hostilities in Lebanon, civilians accounted for more than 90 percent of the deaths – a significant majority of them being women and children.

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- It is estimated that 70-80 percent of the world's refugees are women and children. In some countries, the figure can be higher. For instance, as many as 90 percent of Ethiopian refugees in Somalia were women and children. Over 80 percent of Salvadorean refugees in Nicaragua were women and children, and most of the Guatemalan refugees seeking asylum in Mexico were women and children. Women-headed households constituted the majority of families living in refugee camps throughout the world, reports a HNHCR *Not on Refugee Women*.
- Many of the cruel and degrading practices in a conflict and some of the worst forms of violence are directed against women as documented by the Amnesty International in several of its reports.

There is, therefore, a tremendous stake on the part of women to build a culture of peace – both for themselves and for their children and for humanity at large.

First, no permanent foundations of peace and development can be built without the full participation and empowerment of women. The choices must be made by women themselves, not made for them. There are several signs now of a gradual recognition of this central concept of empowerment. The Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Conference on Women have embraced empowerment of women as a vital strategy. Women should not be regarded only as victims of discrimination who must somehow be rescued through special measures. They must be treated as the mainstream of society and as the real agents of change. Investment in women is necessary not as a guilty compensation for past discrimination. Such an investment is vital because women can play a positive role in future development and in building an edifice of peace – and because such investment has higher returns for humanity than any other alternative investment.

Second, while many policies and strategies are to be pursued for a genuine empowerment of women – from employment generation to political participation – it must be appreciated that education of girls and women is the key ingredient for such empowerment. Many recent studies have documented the rich returns a society can get out of educated women- lower fertility, lower child mortality, higher life expectancy, healthier families, more democratic system and greater concerns for peace and stability.

In the light of these observations, let me discuss the issue of gender equality as a pre-condition for human security.

Since the first Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975, much has been accomplished in raising consciousness, in setting norms and standards, and in setting up national and international machineries to implement the various national and global plans of action. Yet, today in no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men, and in developing world of Asia and Africa, the available statistics show glaring disparities in access to social services, income and employment opportunities between men and women. Gender-blind policies and programs have left women behind. Gender-biased customs and traditions have exacerbated their deprivation.

The positive changes that have taken place in the world's economic and political systems in recent years have been made possible to a great extent by the role that women have played in bringing them about. This encompasses the movements for democratization, peace, environment, anti-apartheid, to the contribution of their cheap labor to fuel the economic growth of the industrializing tigers of East Asia.

Economic development and women's advancement are intricately linked. Where women have advanced, economic growth has followed. The stagnant economies usually show lack of participation of women. Over the past two decades several positive changes have taken place in the direction of women's equality with men in areas such as education and training, legal status, employment, credit, decision-making positions etc. Taken together, these have contributed to improving women's status in industrial countries and some middle-income developing countries. But the situation of women in the vast majority of developing countries, especially in their rural areas, is still grim. The gradual achievement of *de jure* equality for women is reflected in the increase in the number of states which have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In most of these states, ratification or accession has required the elimination of legal restrictions that had impeded women from obtaining access to factors of production, such as land, capital and technology and social services such as education and health. But progress towards implementing the Convention, especially in countries where the constitutional principles and the articles of the Convention do not converge, has been minimal.

### Gender gap in capability

The basic indicators normally used to assess human development have registered some progress for women during the last two decades. Yet these cold statistics also show how far and how fast the societies have to go to implement the various global and national commitments made in order to close the gender gap in education, health, nutrition and other indicators of capability enhancement. For example,

- In 1995, out of about 871 million illiterate people in the world, 556 million were women.
- In 1995, gender gap remained pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In Sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of male were literate to less than half of adult women. In South Asia, the gap between male and female literacy rates stood at 26 percentage points.
- Globally, out of 110 million out-of-school children, two-thirds were girls. In South Asia, out of 56.5 million out-of-school children 33.2 million were girls; in the Arab states, there were 6.1 million girls among 8.2 million out-of-school children.
- In 1995, primary school enrolment ratio for girls decreased for some 18 Sub-Saharan countries, widening the gender gap. In South Asia, net enrolment ratio for boys increased, resulting in a gender gap of 20 percentage points.
- Health and nutritional indicators remained distressingly low for girls and women, with maternal mortality rate around 600 per 100,000 live births in Sub-Saharan Africa and about 500 in South Asia.
- Most of the billion people who live in poverty are women in the rural areas of the developing world.

Table 1 shows women's education and health status by region

**Table 2: Women's education and health status by region**

	S.S.Africa	South Asia	Arab states	East Asia	Latin Am. and Caribb.
Adult fem.					

Literacy -Rate	44.6	34.2	40.7	71.0	84.1
-Female as % of male	66	55	62	80	97
Girls enrolment in primary school -Ratio					
-Girls as % of boys	54 85	71 75	78 92	95 96	86 98
Girls enrolment in secondary school -Ratio	18	12	44	85	44
-Girls as % of boys	72	60	77	79	98
Female life expectancy	52.5	60.5	63.5	70.8	71.2
Total fertility rate (1992)	6.3	4.2	4.9	2.0	3.1
Maternal mortality rate	606	469	294	92	189

Source: UNDP Human Development Reports 1995 & 1996 (1992 & 1993 statistics)

### Gender gap in opportunity

What is more disturbing, however, is the lack of opportunities for women. Women still stand at the periphery of economic and political life. Globally, women's share in market employment is about 40 percent, in South Asia it is about one-third; their wage rate is normally three-fourths of the male rate; they receive less than 10 percent of commercial credit from banks; they form less than 15 percent of top managers and administrators; and they constitute less than 10 percent of the world's parliaments and 8 percent of the world's cabinets. The global average, however, gives a much better picture than it really is. For example, in South Asia, where four countries had women as heads of state or government in recent past, women's share in decision-making positions in the cabinet is only 6.4 percent, and in administrative and managerial posts is 3 percent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the corresponding statistics are 7.0 percent and 10 percent. **The challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is clear. It is not only to eliminate the remaining gender gaps in education, health and nutrition. Much more concerned efforts should be made to opening up greater economic and political opportunities for women.**

Despite prominent role of women in food production, women have the least access to means of production, receive the lowest wages and are least knowledgeable about how to improve the productivity of land through modern inputs and technology. The impact of rural migration to urban areas and to overseas to get out of poverty traps has been to increase the number of female-headed

households to carry the full burden of income generation and household management without any reciprocal strategies and facilities to enable women to carry out these tasks.

**Table 2**  
**Women's Economic and Political Participation**

	S.S. Africa	South Asia	Arab States	East Asia	Latin Ame. & the Caribb.	Industrial countries	World
Women's share in labour force	42	31	25	45	33	44	40
Administrators & managers							
- % of female	10	3	13	11	20	27	14
- Female as % of male	12	3	15	13	26	44	18
Professional & technical workers							
- % of female	28	21	30	45	49	48	39
- Female as % of male	42	29	45	81	106	95	71
Share of women in							
- government	7.7	4.7	2.6	2.4	13.6	10.8	8.7
- cabinet	7.9	6.5	4.4	3.2	10.7	12.6	9.1

*Source: UNDP, Human Development Reports 1995 & 1996*

### **Why such disparity?**

Gender disparity persists because of the existence of discrimination against girls and women in several areas:

- **Legal discrimination.** Despite feminist movements all over the world, serious legal discrimination still persists against women in most societies, including the industrial ones. For instance, in Japan, the inheritance rights of women were raised from one-third to one-half of their late husbands' property only in 1980. In Switzerland, several cantons denied women the right to vote only a decade ago. But women's pressures are changing laws in all industrial countries. In developing countries, however, legal discrimination is stark and remains largely invisible and non-transparent – extending all the way from denial of voting rights to denial of

permission even to drive a car, from unequal and unfair property rights to legal barriers to hold certain jobs.

- **Market discrimination.** Markets discriminates against women everywhere but this discrimination is far greater in developing countries, with women normally confined to some low income-earning activities in the informal sector. Women are still the last to be hired and the first to be fired in the market place. In Latin America, women receive 7 to 10 per cent of the total credit from the formal banking system. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women are responsible for 90 percent of total food production, yet they receive 10 percent of credit to small farmers and one percent of credit to agriculture. In 1990, only 5 percent of multinational banks' rural credit of nearly \$6 billion reached women, according to UNDP's HDR 1995.
- **Discrimination in national income accounts.** Women, even though they perform more than half the total economic work in the world, get paid only for one-third of their work since most of their work is within the household and in the community. To the world's national income accounts, most of women's work remains invisible and unrecognized.
- **Political discrimination.** Despite having over 50 percent of the vote, women elect less than 10 percent of their own gender in the world's parliament. No wonder then that less than nine percent of national cabinets are composed of women, and in 1990, only nine countries had women as their heads of government.
- **Social discrimination.** But the most disturbing feature of women's treatment as separate and inferior human beings is the cross of lifelong social discrimination that they carry, resulting in infanticide to malnutrition within the family, to child abuse, to rape, and to violence. There is not a single country in the world where violence against women is not a significant problem.
  - In India, bridal dowry disputes led husbands and in-laws to kill more than 5000 wives in 1991.
  - In Pakistan, for a rapist to receive punishment, four adults must testify in court that they witnessed the actual rape.
  - In Brazil, a man can kill his wife and be acquitted on grounds of honour.
  - In Kenya in 1991, 19 school girls suffocated to death while trying to escape a gang rape by fellow male students. The teacher testified at the court that the boys did not mean the girls any harms, they only wanted to rape them!

These are not easy matters to comprehend except by women themselves – how they carry within themselves the scars of centuries of social discrimination.

### **Global Commitments**

The Fourth World Conference on Women was a milestone in the progress towards women's advancement. A solemn declaration and a far-reaching Platform for Action provide global commitments and action points on a wide range of areas to achieve the three objectives of the Conference –equality, development and peace. This was the largest UN conferences with 189 member states representing some 17,000 participants and 30,000 NGO representatives laboriously piecing together a document containing

350-plus paragraphs of critical concerns and recommendations for actions in order to usher in an equitable and sustainable human society for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The objectives of equality, development and peace have been on the agenda of the UN conferences held during the last twenty years. Tremendous progress has been made during this period in raising consciousness, undertaking research to identify bottlenecks and actions and in improving women's capabilities through better access to education and health. But gender equality and true peace in the world have remained elusive.

The UN conferences in the nineties – the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Rio Summit on Environment and Development, the Children's Summit in New York, and the Education for All in Jomtien – not only underlined the essential links between women's empowerment and social and economic development, but provided frameworks for action and follow up mechanisms. Beijing Conference for Action is a consolidation of all these previous global commitments, strengthening some areas, adding others, so in the final shape this PFA has emerged as a Magna Carta for gender equality.

### **Beijing Platform for Action – Key Areas**

The Beijing Platform is the strongest consensus ever produced by the world's governments on women's equality and empowerment. The Platform ranges from broad general statements on economic, political, social and legal discriminations against women to specific micro issues and recommendations. As discrimination against women starts early even before a girl child is born, the Platform breaks new ground in giving recognition to differential needs of women at different stages of their lives and to the special needs and concerns of girls, the women of tomorrow. The key areas of focus of the Platform are:

- 1. Poverty:** The PFA recognizes that women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities, in particular to the lack of access to credit, land ownership and inheritance, and lack of education and other support services. It urges governments to formulate and implement policies and programs to remove these bottlenecks, to revise laws and administrative practices to recognize women's rights to economic resources.
- 2. Access to education and training:** The Platform asserts that education is a basic human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace, and urges governments to ensure universal and equal access to and completion of primary education by all girls and boys, reduce illiteracy among women, and develop and implement training programs for women for reentering the job market.

3. **Access to health and related services:** Lack of basic health services for women and discriminating practices in access to health and nutrition for girl child have led to high rates of maternal mortality and unnatural female/male sex ratio in many developing countries. The PFA reaffirms the commitment of governments to support and implement the Programme of Action of ICPD to meet the health needs of girls and women.
4. **Violence against women:** Violence against girls and women in all situations – conflicts/wars, domestic, economic reasons or traditional practices –are all manifestations of unequal relationship between men and women and, as the PFA strongly advocates, must be condemned. The PFA asks governments and international organizations to declare that rape in armed conflict situations constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity. Further the PFA suggests that the standards set out in international humanitarian law and human rights instruments to prevent all acts of violence against women be upheld and reinforced.
5. **Participation in decision-making bodies:** In the decision-making fora of the world, women are still outsiders. In order to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures, the PFA urges governments to commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and in the judiciary; and take positive actions to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions.
6. **Institutional arrangements for implementation of PFA:** The Platform recognizes that national machineries for the advancement of women have been established in almost every country but asserts that “these machineries are diverse in form, uneven in their effectiveness, often marginalized in national government structures, and are frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training and resources and sufficient support from national political leaderships.” The Platform goes on to suggest that mechanisms established at the regional and international levels to promote women's advancement “encounter similar problems emanating from a lack of commitment at the highest level.” PFA stresses that the commitment at the highest political level is essential for implementation and underlines the prime responsibility of governments to improve the effectiveness of national mechanisms with adequate budget and staffing.

The Beijing Platform for Action has not been costed as each country needs to prepare its own estimates as to how much it will cost to bring women and their work into the mainstream. Many of the actions may need only changes in legislation, administrative practices, attitudes, behavior etc. and not necessarily additional budgetary resources. But the programs for eradicating poverty, providing access to and improving the quality of education, health and family planning services will require additional funds from internal and external sources. The promise to provide additional resources in the form of reaching the goal of 0.7% of developed-country GNP did not materialize. Nor did the developing countries come forward to commit

themselves to implement the 20/20 compact to which a few donors and recipient countries agreed at the Social Summit. An engendering of the 20/20 compact (which means that the 20 percent of both developing country and donor budgets will be used for five social priority concerns: basic education, primary healthcare, family planning, reduction of severe malnutrition and provision of drinking water) requires that these basic social services focus on women. If this is done in the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action, the lowest form of deprivation that women suffer will be overcome.

### **Tasks Ahead**

The Beijing Platform for Action has urged each government to draw up its own national plan of action and formulate specific strategies for eliminating existing gender gaps in access to basic social services and for opening up of economic and political opportunities for women. Without the backup of such national plans, global and regional plans will remain distant dreams. During the last year (1996) many governments, with the assistance of international agencies and NGOs, are engaged in drawing up such plans. What follows is an attempt to contribute to national thinking on some priority areas of action required for women's empowerment.

From the perspective of developing countries, while the empowerment of women requires actions in a number of areas, actions in four areas must be considered critical. These are: (a) capability-enhancement measures such as programs of education, health and family planning; (b) legal measures to provide justice to women and to open the doors of opportunity; (c) financial measures to provide access to credit and give recognition to women's economic contribution; and (d) institutional measures to assist in the implementation and monitoring of Beijing Platform for Action.

#### *Capability-enhancement measures*

The first element in any empowerment strategy is education and skill training which lay the foundation for knowledge for better health, nutrition and income-earning capability. Sufficient evidence has accumulated on the beneficial impact of women's education on economic productivity, health and nutrition of family and enhancement of women's knowledge about their political and legal rights. Increasingly, the world is growing to recognize and acknowledge the enormous benefits of educating girls. A coherent strategy must be designed by each country to enable girls to have equal access to quality education as boys. Equally, facilities for basic health and family planning services are essential for poor women in rural areas in developing world so that they can combine their reproductive responsibilities with their economically

productive role. Governments must set a defined time period over which gender disparities in education, health and nutrition are removed through well-targeted investment programs and policy adjustments.

#### *Legal measures*

Comprehensive documentation of legal discrimination against women is a must for every country as a basis for determining which law should be passed or which existing discriminatory laws should be repealed. But even when the laws that discriminate against women are repealed, women's problems do not go away. For the majority of world's women, the ability to exercise equal rights in the real world is far more important than just getting some rights on paper.

#### *Financial measures*

Nothing empowers women so much as access to income-earning opportunity. Access to credit is critical for that purpose. Women are in fact best savers and investors – as the experience of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has shown – but are generally regarded as not credit worthy for loans from formal banking system. In order to extend credit to women, countries may have to set up special facilities for extending small loans for setting up micro enterprises. Many countries have set up such facilities, but these are in general very small-scale efforts. Multilateral development institutions have to join governments to scale up these operations so that a big push is made to reduce the number of people in poverty to at least half by a defined period. Also in line with the recommendations of the Beijing Conference, countries need to prepare satellite national income accounts in order to reflect the real economic contribution of women.

#### *Institutional measures*

The Beijing Conference Platform for Action provides a concrete agenda for women's empowerment. But it fails to address boldly the institutional structure needed for its implementation. The Platform recognizes that effective implementation will require changes in institutions and organizations, acknowledging a "need to renew, reform and revitalize the various parts of the United Nations system." Yet its suggestions reflect more of the same – strengthening the existing institutions with more funding and human resources.

I am convinced that a sustained progress on women's development cannot be made without a high-level UN Agency dedicated to women's advancement on the same pattern as UNICEF, which is dedicated to children's causes. Unfortunately, this issue did not get much support in Beijing, not because of the merits of the case – but because too many territorial interests got in the way. We are all paying for that inaction today by not having a dedicated agency to follow up Beijing Platform for Action.

My proposal for establishing a United Nations Agency for the Advancement of Women (UNAAW) concerns the need for adequate institutional machinery at international as well as national levels for formulating and implementing policies and strategies for women's empowerment and development. The current institutional arrangements at the UN for women's advancement are far too dispersed, underfunded and understaffed to exercise a major leadership role within the UN system on critical issues affecting women. We need a single, integrated, highly visible UN Agency for Women to take forward policy advocacy for women in the same manner as UNICEF does for children and UNFPA does for population. Women need an institutional constituency that keeps on fighting for their rights, that keeps their concerns on top of the national and international agendas, that monitors the progress made, and that keeps a pressure in the UN and in the Security Council on issues of development and peace that impact on women. UNAAW can be conceived as an umbrella organization with some existing facilities and programs grouped under its jurisdiction, so it is seen not as a new addition but as an efficient and cost-effective use of existing structures and resources. With the establishment of such a high-powered global body overseeing the implementation of Beijing PFA, existing national institutions will start performing or new ones will take its place. The current national institutions for women's development are in general the most underfunded, understaffed and voiceless bodies on the national scene. It is time to give women's concerns the high level profile and resources that they deserve.

### **Vision for the 21st century**

Let me conclude with a vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is my conviction that the next century will be a century of women. There are several trends pointing to this direction. Let me just three.

First, the gender gap in capability is already closing in education and health in two regions, Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and is likely to be eliminated in other regions as well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women are now knocking on the door of national and global opportunities. Once the capability gap is eliminated, there will be no excuse for maintaining the opportunity gap.

Second, we are now in the middle of the second industrial revolution. Unlike the first, it relies on skills and dexterity, not on muscular strength. The current revolution is led by computers, information superhighways and services. This is where women have a comparative advantage. They can assume a leadership role in this second industrial revolution.

Third, we are also living in the middle of rapid democratic transition all over the world. People are shaping governance through their voices. Women are discovering that they often form the majority of voters and that they can exercise a powerful influence over national issues through their votes. Women's empowerment in the political fields is an inevitable consequence of democracy.

I firmly believe that women cannot – and will not- be denied their rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next century belongs to women’s liberation and empowerment. And then we shall be able to discuss human security not for less than half of the world’s people but all people.

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