

This document is signed by EWL, BPW Europe and BPW International

Women and girls can't wait 20 more years to enjoy their full human rights!

“All human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development – are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated”

Beijing Platform for Action

2015 is an exciting time for women's rights and for the women's movement globally. The international community will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, a human rights instrument for women and girls adopted in 1995. At the same time, the European Union (EU) will adopt a new Strategy for action on gender equality and women's empowerment for the coming 5 years. At international level, a new global Post-2015 framework for development will be adopted, which should put women's rights and gender equality at its centre. As a backdrop to this, a vibrant new wave of feminist activism is bursting forth throughout the world and in Europe, connecting women and men in new campaigns and actions to combat discrimination and misogyny.

Adopted two years after the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the Beijing Platform for Action aimed to bring to light the structural inequalities and human rights violations faced by all women and girls on the planet, and setting the foundations for concrete action to realise *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men.

20 years later, much has been achieved, but much remains to be done. The report of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) "[From Words to Action](#)" provides a picture of the situation of women and girls in Europe today, based on the collective assessment of its 2000 member organisations. While we should be celebrating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, we know and see that women and girls still face inequality, violence, discrimination and insecurity, in all spheres of life and society.

Women and girls in Europe are now present in all spheres of society, from education to employment, reaching positions of political and business decision-making, expressing their views as artists, journalists, researchers, or community leaders. They are more able than ever to bring their voice to the political debates and raise their concerns. Events, campaigns and conferences are taking place in different countries, giving life to a renewed women's social movement. Nordic women's organisations came together at the Nordiskt Forum in June 2014 and organised four days of activism, arts and reflection on today's challenges. The women of Hungary organised in 2013 the first Women's Congress since 1989! A new generation of young feminists is mobilising widely, making the most of new communication technologies, and dynamically tackling new and old forms of violations

of their rights. There is international outrage and massive waves of solidarity in response to violations of women's rights as witnessed by the reactions to the appalling cases of rape in India. Some men are taking a public stance or engaging in the feminist movement, to support women's organisations' demands. Feminist economists are challenging the current system we live in, by proposing new ways of measuring wellbeing and protecting our planet and the next generations.

However, despite this optimistic picture of a renewed feminism in Europe, women's rights are facing a stronger backlash than ever.

Ultra-conservative and religious groups are systematically calling gender equality into question, by attacking women's sexual and reproductive rights, sexuality education, women's access to employment and decision-making. Some men's groups are getting media attention to their reactionary demands for patriarchal structures. With the 2014 European elections, we are seeing more populist and misogynist parliamentarians sitting in the European Parliament, directly threatening EU policies to promote gender equality and women's rights. The myth of "equality being already there" in Europe is still strong and prevents gender equality from becoming a standalone goal for the EU, despite the fact that equality between women and men is one of its core values. The recent climate of austerity reinforces the idea, for many decision-makers and individuals, that women's rights are "the icing on the cake". Financial cuts are threatening the very existence of women's organisations.

Additionally, the neoliberal system and the consumer society are impacting detrimentally on women's and girls' empowerment, by commodifying their body and sexuality and perpetuating gender stereotypes throughout all spheres of society. We are worried to see that the cult of individualism has become so widespread that structural violations of women's rights are not taken seriously. Stereotypes persist in all spheres of society: they shape toys for boys and girls (blue and pink...), influence girls' choices in education, prevent women from accessing some jobs, impact on women's and girls' health, legitimise violence and everyday sexism, and convey restrictive messages about women's role in society.

In 2015, in such a strategic time for humanity, women's organisations would expect all countries to take a step further and deliver new commitments to go beyond the Beijing Platform for Action. Instead, we see a growing profound and structural movement of antifeminist and ultraconservative ideas, affecting all policies in all continents. This movement contests the goal of equality between women and men, develops argumentation based on religion, tradition or culture to legitimate violations of women's rights, challenges universal human rights and the global solidarity for women's rights.

This is why we want to call on all member states to pay attention to the following challenges for the future of women's human rights and of the younger generations, and to take action in the CSW and post-2015 negotiations to make sure that the voice of women's organisations is included in their commitments:

- Women's and girls' rights and empowerment are universal goals, which cannot tolerate any exception, justification or excuse. It is time to understand that peaceful and sustainable

development cannot be achieved if half the planet's population is not fully enjoying their human rights. We need a new paradigm for human rights: human rights are about a collective vision and solidarity, they are not tools to promote individualism. **We call on all member states to reaffirm their commitment to all interconnected and universal human rights, and systematically ensure a women's rights perspective in their work.**

- The current economic, political and social system has proven to be unsustainable, dangerous for the Planet, and unable to include and protect the most vulnerable, starting with women and girls. The celebration of Beijing+20 is the ideal opportunity to remind everyone that women and girls are half of the population and their needs should be integrated in the global conversation on the major challenges that humanity is facing now: climate change and the future of biodiversity, poverty and redistribution, trade, sustainable development, food and land, water and energy, inequalities and violations of human rights, militarisation and conflicts, governance of the current economic and financial system. **We call on all member states to equally include women's organisations and experts in all global discussion on all issues.**
- We need a shift in the values conveyed by our economic and financial systems: from profitability to wellbeing, from competition to solidarity, from inequality to transparency. The economy must serve the wellbeing of all, and not the other way round. In the current system, women's economic independence is not guaranteed. We are alarmed to see how the obsession of growth is prioritised over women's rights, and unreservedly condemn the EU request to member states to include prostitution in their national statistics. Investing in women's rights is the most urgent and smart action to protect the planet and see future generations equal, empowered, living in peace and dignity. Feminist economists are an inspiration for a radical new vision for people and planet, including of the care economy, and the women's movement is allying with other social movements to propose alternatives based on rights, solidarity and equality. **We call on all member states to deliver a new model for development and peace, with women's and girls' rights, and feminist economics and values at its core.**
- In many parts of the world, including Europe, women human rights' defenders are being threatened and attacked. Grassroots action by women's organisations makes a real change at all levels of personal life, community and society. We cannot accept the dismantling of civil society and call for sustainable support to women's organisations, as a key part of a healthy democratic life. **We call on all member states to abide by their duty to develop democratic societies and civil dialogue, and protect all human rights activists.**
- Women are not a homogenous group and have multiple identities. This diversity is what makes our societies so interesting and creative. But living in systems where racism, sexism and classism are still prevalent, women with multiple identities are rendered more vulnerable to discrimination, violence and violation of their rights. The situation of migrant or undocumented women, women from ethnic minorities, indigenous women, Roma women, women with disabilities, rural women, girls, older women, lesbians and bisexual women,

transgender women, has long been made invisible. **We call on all member states to make sure that all policies are designed to not leave a single girl or women behind.**

- The prevalence and persistence of gender stereotypes show that the shift of mentalities remains the highest challenge for the realisation of women's rights. While legislation is key, it is not enough and should be accompanied by political will to keep women's rights on the highest level of the political agenda, at all times. **We call on all member states to elaborate comprehensive and ambitious strategies to realise women's and girls' rights which should not only develop and implement legislation, but also make a concrete change in mentalities and values.**
- Ending all forms of violence against women and girls should be a priority: there won't be peace as long as women or girls live in fear of violence. There can be no excuse, custom, tradition, or religious consideration used to violate women's rights and legitimise male violence. Violence against women cannot be considered a private issue; it is a human rights issue. **We call on all member states to reiterate their commitment to end all forms of violence against women and girls, in order to reach the highest level of equality, development and peace for all.**
- In a context of global economic, social and environmental crisis, the United Nations and the member states have a duty to protect women and girls worldwide: **we call on the UN and the member states to reaffirm their commitment to existing United Nations agreed language and instruments on women's rights and equality between women and men.** We condemn the trivialisation of prostitution as work by some UN agencies and reports, which renders invisible the structural harm of the system of prostitution and its links with trafficking in human beings, and we call on member states to reaffirm their commitment to the UN 1949 New York Convention. We want to see strong international commitment to guarantee and promote women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, at a time where we should be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Cairo International Conference for Population and Development. We condemn attacks on LGBTI persons and want to see a recognition of the diversity of families and relationships.

The European Union and its member states, as part of the international community, are at a political turning point: they must choose to lead the way towards a gender equal and sustainable future. Investing in women's rights and empowerment is the core commitment for a more sustainable, democratic and inclusive world to evolve. We see the nomination, for the first time ever, of a Commissioner for Gender Equality as an opportunity to put women's rights at the centre of European politics, and we call on this new EU Commissioner for Gender Equality to build on the recommendations outlined in EWL Beijing+20 report to develop an ambitious new strategy for all women and girls in Europe to enjoy their full human rights. We also call on all EU member states to strengthen their institutional mechanisms and commitments for women's and girls' rights.

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