



*Statement of WIDE Austria
(10.2.2010)*

Beijing revisited: In memory of better times

Routine event of the Commission on the Status of Women on Beijing + 15 instead of the long overdue 5th World Conference on Women

We, the undersigned, want to express our concern at the fact that even fifteen years after Beijing, no 5th World Conference on Women is taking place. There is clear evidence that the Women's Conferences, which were organized by the United Nations since 1975, have had a great **impact** on how women see themselves and on the development of women's self-esteem, on changes in national and international gender-specific legislation, on the actual living conditions of women and on their solidarity and communication amongst themselves.

Stop the bureaucratic backlash!

Looking back on the last few decades, we find that on the one hand, the **intervals** between these large international women's events have become longer, and that on the other hand, there has been less and less **committed work on the issues**:

Whereas United Nations World Conferences on Women took place at five-year intervals in **Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi** during the pioneering years of the International Women's Decade (1975-1985), ten years elapsed before the 4th World Conference on Women was held in **Beijing** in 1995. The "**Platform for Action**" adopted there recommended some far-reaching actions that had never before been discussed at an event of this scale. NGOs, among them members of WIDE Austria, contributed decisively to the success of the conference. Especially in countries of the global South, the contents of the Platform for Action was communicated to the population and translated into new legislation.

Within the scope of the Platform for Action, the commitment to **mainstreaming a gender perspective** into all policies and programs, insistence on the **human rights of women** and the clearly stated **interconnectedness and interdependence** of all recommendations for action in strategic areas are of fundamental importance. It should be noted in this context that the platform made progress first and foremost with respect to civil and political rights, whereas no fundamental system changes were envisaged in the economic, social and cultural sphere. An important recommendation of the Platform is that all UN members should speedily draw up **national action plans** for the implementation of the Platform for Action. Austria has until now failed to meet this obligation.

A **special session of the General Assembly** of the UN was held in the year **2000** to review the implementation of the Platform for Action, but the Outcome Document of this meeting was surprisingly unsystematic and confusing. And in **2005**, women had to content themselves with the Beijing + 10 Review in the context of the annual meeting of the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**.

For fifteen years, every concrete attempt to call a 5th UN World Conference on Women was blocked, despite intensive efforts by NGOs all over the world, including in Austria, and despite the overriding importance that would have attached to such an event, especially with regard to economic issues. And in **2010**, we find that this proposal is **not included** in the proceedings to Beijing+15, which constitute only **one item** among others on the agenda of the **CSW meeting**, which takes place every year in New York in late February/early March. This comes at a time of widespread **crises** in the spheres of the economy, finance, climate, energy, the environment and food supply, crises which go hand in hand with the dismantling of democratic structures and have a particularly negative impact on women – and again, women in the global South are the most affected – a time when a conference **at the highest level** would have been crucial for an assessment of the increasing feminization of poverty and for the formulation of strategies to overcome it.

The two-day **NGO event** scheduled to take place in New York before the meeting of the CSW, while certainly a contribution to strengthening international women's solidarity, does nothing to change the fundamentally disappointing character of this **compromise solution**. What WIDE Austria stated already in 2005 also applies to the **Beijing + 15 Review**:

„That the question of how power and property are distributed between men and women is not discussed in a more prestigious forum than that of a UN Commission of increasingly bureaucratic ilk, and that this discussion will be conducted without benefit of media attention, is a setback for the international women's movement which can hardly be redressed.“

Implementing gender justice in development policies and international economic relations

As a development policy network of women, WIDE Austria is particularly interested in ways to integrate gender justice into Austria's **development cooperation policies** and its **international policies in the fields of economy and ecology**, and to overcome **poverty and discrimination** suffered by women in countries of the South. WIDE has been working in these areas for 17 years.

As a matter of principle, **all articles** of the Platform for Action constitute binding guidelines for the formulation of Austria's policies in the fields of development cooperation and international economic relations.

In particular, many concrete and detailed actions have been formulated in **Chapter IV** on Strategic Objectives and Actions in the critical areas of concern **A** (Women and poverty), **F** (Women and the economy), **H**. (Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women) and **K** (Women and the environment).

In **Chapter V** on Institutional Arrangements, national, regional and international institutions and organizations are emphatically called upon to implement the Platform for Action. Austria should have submitted a **National Action Plan** for implementation no later than by the end of 1996. Successive governments' failure to do so has been a subject of continual strong criticism by WIDE Austria.

In the context in which WIDE is active, another important point are the recommendations to the **international financial institutions** – the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are expressly mentioned. The Platform for Action called upon international financial institutions to –

- *ensure that their investments and programs benefit women,*
- *increase the number of women in high-level positions and increase staff training in gender analysis,*
- *establish regular and substantive dialogue, including dialogue at the field level, for more efficient and effective coordination of their assistance in order to strengthen the effectiveness of their programs for the benefit of women and their families.*

The recommendation to the **World Trade Organization** (WTO) is less precise and limits itself to this cautious proposal to the UN General Assembly:

- *The General Assembly should give consideration to inviting the World Trade Organization to consider how it might contribute to the implementation of the Platform for Action, including activities in cooperation with the United Nations system.*

Fundamental actions

Representatives of WIDE Austria were present at the Women's World Conferences in Copenhagen and Beijing, at the special session of the UN General Assembly in New York in 2000, at many meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, including at the Beijing + 10 Review in 2005; in some instances, they also participated in the events as members of the official delegation.

On the occasion of the Beijing+15 Review, WIDE Austria is putting forward the following **fundamental demands**, which we address both to the Austrian government and to the international community of nations. We are calling on you to –

- advocate and work for a **top-level United Nations conference** – at least within the framework of a special session of the General Assembly – to be held as soon as possible to discuss the impact of the current multiple crises on women and consider ways of overcoming it and improving women's participation in economic policy decisions. This conference should expressly consider **new, proactive strategies**, especially in the economic, social and ecological field, and not just discuss a re-formulation of the Beijing recommendations;
- draft and implement comprehensive strategies to **overcome** the poverty and rightlessness of women worldwide, but especially in countries of the global South, which has been exacerbated by the above-mentioned multiple crises;
- take action to improve the status of women and their access to **positions of leadership**.

Detailed demands in the economic area

The following detailed demands and recommendations appear to be conducive to ensuring the social and economic rights of poor women in countries of the global South, and we call upon the Austrian government, as well as all members of the CSW to –

- engage in a fundamental, critical rethinking of the dominant, growth-oriented **concept of development** and create a humane economic system focused on strengthening the

economy of care as well as **ecologically sustainable economic activity**, including implementation of food sovereignty;

- actively work within the **United Nations**, especially within the General Assembly, the Security Council and the UN's relevant special organizations, as well as in relevant programs and agreements of the **European Union, the OECD, the international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO)**, to ensure and implement economic gender justice in countries of the global South;
- insist in this context that the **IMF** and the **WTO** include an express commitment to gender justice in their agreements, and that they monitor the implementation of this commitment and renounce the conditions they have hitherto imposed (structural adjustment programs, privatization and deregulation).
- introduce a new system of **regulation of the banking and financial sector** and **include women** in the reform process;
- improve the integration and implementation of a comprehensive gender perspective in all areas of **development cooperation**, especially through closer collaboration in this respect and education of organizations in the partner countries, as well through expansion and continual evaluation of projects that promote the economic rights of women.
- reassess all relations to countries of the South in the field of **international economic relations** (including trade, financial and environmental policies) from the perspective of gender justice;
- define **indicators** and conduct (more) surveys to collect gender-segregated data to determine the extent of female poverty in countries of the South;
- increase the **support for NGOs** that support the realization of women's social, economic and cultural rights in countries of the South;
- draft **targeted strategies** to reduce female poverty in countries of the global South;
- improve women's access to inexpensive **sources of finance**;
- increase **research, information and education (training)** about female poverty and how to overcome it in countries of the global South;
- implement **external independent monitoring of business enterprises** that are active in countries of the South with respect to how they comply with and protect the economic rights of women; install **binding instruments** securing the compliance of women's rights and internationally recognised social and ecological standards by companies and establishing adequate forms of sanctions in case of non-compliance.

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