

**ARROW Statement for 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:**

## **THE TIME IS NOW TO ACCELERATE THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS!**

Twenty-five years ago this month, at the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women, representatives of governments and activists from across the globe came together to produce the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Through this instrumental outcome document, the platform gave us commitments in twelve critical areas of concern, envisioning gender equality in all dimensions, and a world where each woman and girl can exercise their freedoms and choices and realise all their rights.

Twenty-five years on, no country has fully realised this agenda, and many are far from reaching the goal of achieving gender equality. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed new challenges, it has exposed the existing multidimensional inequalities, reinforced long standing gender inequality with an increased severity and disproportionately impacting women and girls. In Asia and the Pacific alone there has been an increase in unpaid care and domestic work, job and income loss, the effects of the lockdown have been seen on gender-based violence related risk, forced marriage and interrupted access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.<sup>i</sup>

Women today in all their diversities remain marginalised and denied their human rights. Even before COVID-19, patriarchal, militaristic, and authoritarian governments were rising across the region leading to increased attacks on feminists and women and environmental human rights defenders. Women and girls continue to be made systemically invisible in decision making spaces including decisions regarding their own bodies which has made it impossible to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all.

Gender equality does not just require addressing discrimination against women and girls, but also dismantling existing structures, social norms and institutions that replicate and promote the binary of femininity and masculinity, and centering people's freedom, safety and dignity. The principles and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are more relevant and important today than ever if we want to build back better.

At this pivotal juncture, we urge member states to recommit to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to ensure acceleration of actions to achieve gender equality in a measurable and meaningful way for all women and girls. This will require:

- Fulfilling the commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We strongly feel that the principles and objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo International Conference on Population & Development, 1994), the Beijing Platform for Action in addition to other human rights treaties are critical to attaining the SDGs and ensuring accountability. To fulfil the SDGs,
  - Identify and remove structural and systemic barriers and uphold the commitment to fully implement the SDGs for all women and girls.
  - Accelerate progress specifically towards SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 3 on health access, through allocation of adequate budgets and regular monitoring of its implementation.
- Upholding SRHR of all women and girls including a range of SRH services.
  - This includes safe abortion, contraception for all throughout the life cycle while ensuring implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and recognising Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression Equality (SOGIE). This means addressing unmet need for all SRH information and services and ensuring access for marginalised women and girls, youth and people living with disabilities.
  - Recognising the rights of all women and girls to safe abortion as a human right by all parties. Where illegal, decriminalise abortion, and where legal, remove conditionality and restrictions in abortion law in the region and ensure that legal uncertainty and bureaucracy is addressed in instances where legalisation has been achieved.
  - Ending discriminatory, and harmful laws and practices that perpetuate violence, legitimise female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage, criminalise consent in relation to sexual autonomy of young people; and also, those that maintain inequalities in inheritance, citizenship, nationality, marriage and its dissolution.
- Ensuring that health is a human right provided to all and carry out constitutional obligations to adequately resource and provide universal access to SRHR.
  - Regulate the private health sector to provide acceptable, affordable, accessible, quality health services and ensure dignity and respect, privacy and confidentiality.
  - Ensure universal access to social security, universal health coverage (UHC) of sufficient quality, without financial hardship. These services should be available to all, and these include universal access to contraception, delivery and safe abortion services which is important to reduce adolescent, maternal, new born, and child mortality and morbidity and improve women's reproductive health irrespective of their marital status.

- Recognising and addressing barriers that prevent gender parity in leadership and workplace to ensure and accelerate women's meaningful participation and representation.
  - Recognise and address barriers that prevent women's economic participation. The pandemic has exposed the economic discrimination against women. Women are over-represented in jobs that are part-time, informal, lower skilled, lower paid and precarious.
  - Ensure social protection, wage security, freedom from violence and harassment, and right to association of all workers – in the formal and informal economy, including migrant workers, domestic workers and women farmers.
  - Recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid work through state investments in universal social protection, public services, and gender responsive infrastructure.
  - Promote and protect women's ownership, use and control of land, water, seeds, commons, and traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, and ensure food sovereignty.
  
- Committing to strengthen the availability of high-quality, relevant and sufficiently disaggregated data.
  - Identify and bridge data gaps on gender. Data is still lacking on multiple domains related to women and girl's well-being and vulnerabilities, these gaps continue to hamper ongoing efforts to understand current situation and the interventions needed to achieve gender equality. Immediate and specific attention is needed to generating quality data on SRH, unpaid care work, violence prevalence, and harmful practices like FGM/C.
  - Invest in generating disaggregated data. Data that considers variations defined by markers such as age, race, ethnicity and sexual identity can be used for devising appropriate policies and programmes that address intersectional diverse needs. Strengthening the policy and programme data nexus towards evidence-based monitoring of the SDG on gender equality and health.
  
- Fulfilling commitments to the women, peace, and security agenda in line with 1325 and subsequent resolutions.
  
- Addressing climate justice through gender responsive and human rights-based actions, and by acting upon gendered impact of the climate crisis.
  
- Putting in place redress mechanisms for grievances at all levels to hold stakeholders accountable on gender equality related violations.
  
- Lastly, seeking meaningful, regular and sustained engagement from women's movements and regional and national civil society in meeting and monitoring the commitments around gender equality.

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<sup>i</sup> UN Women "The First 100 Days of Covid in Asia and the Pacific: A Gender Lens, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/the-first-100-days-of-the-covid-19-outbreak-in-asia-and-the-pacific>