

Leadership in the international Women's movement to achieve Peace, Equality and Development

Speech By Hon. Ambassador Gertrude I. Mongella, President of the Pan African Parliament, Presented at the 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women (WW05) in Seoul, Korea, June 20, 2005.

The ninth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women commencing today, has brought together here in Seoul, more than 3000 people. We all come with a rich diversity of experiences, cultures, and academic disciplines, political and social philosophies that emanate from different levels of economic development. A conference of this magnitude requires commitment, sacrifices and resources on the part of the organizers. I therefore commend the members of the organizing committee for a job well done. I would like to specifically thank the Government of the Republic of Korea, The Ewha University for hosting the event, and all those who contributed in making this congress a success. My special thanks to Dr. Soon-Young Yoon for her untiring efforts to ensure my participation. It is interesting to note that the majority of people present here today are familiar with each other and have crossed paths through their participation in other global meetings and activities. A global core group of like-minded people, in this case women, has developed in the course of the history of the struggle for the liberation of women world-wide. This is a result of constant networking, communicating, lobbying, supporting each other and sharing information in the course of defining obstacles and the quest for solutions.

This congress therefore offers another opportunity at this point in history of taking stock of the achievements gained. It also gives us an opportunity to weigh the magnitude of the task ahead, in order to achieve the goal of creating a developed, peaceful world where justice and equality are respected and practiced for both men and women of all ages and social backgrounds. In this respect, the role played by the UN and its agencies, national governments and civil society organizations, in giving momentum to the four world conferences on women, cannot be underestimated. These conferences provided opportunity and venue for developing a "gender agenda." They have also been instrumental in the formulation and adoption of universally accepted legal instruments and agreements that recognize women as human beings with rights and responsibilities within the human development paradigm. They include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- The international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- The International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination;
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child'
- The Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment;
- The Declaration on the Right to Development; and
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

In the World Women Conferences held in Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi and finally the one held in Beijing, the goals on development, peace and equality have remained the same. Before the Beijing conference, some historic landmarks were already made towards the acceptance of women's rights as human rights; the silence on violence against women had been broken, the absence of women in the decision making processes became apparent and social, economic and political inequalities between men and women documented by researchers and some solutions were already floated around.

What did Beijing do?

1. Beijing recognized the results of the earlier conferences as building blocks and developed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
2. Beijing defined in very specific terms priority critical areas of concern for women and mobilized consensus for commitment for action from governments, NGOs, private sector and other organizations;
3. Beijing strongly established the need for partnership between men and women in dealing with the critical areas of concern, taking women's concerns as societal issues;
4. Beijing looked at women from a holistic approach and noted the multidisciplinary nature of the critical concerns that require diversified approaches for action;
5. Beijing raised above the north-south, developed and developing divide;
6. The Beijing Conference finally concluded that there is a need for creation of strong institutions and resource mobilization in order to address the critical areas of concern;
7. MOST OF ALL, BEIJING GAVE HOPE FOR CHANGE AND CREATED ENOURMOUS EXPECTATIONS WORLD-WIDE

At the Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 in New York, it became apparent that a number of actions had been taken towards the implementation of the Beijing platform to address the critical areas of concern. To this end, a number of countries have:

- Raised the legal age for marriage;
- Repealed some discriminatory customary laws;
- Allowed and recognized women's ownership of land;
- Banned female genital mutilation;
- Criminalized domestic violence;
- Recognized rape as a war crime and enacted laws against sexual abuse;
- Created institutions to provide services such as education, health and credit for women;

- Established machineries to ensure mainstreaming of gender perspectives in all aspects of the society;
- Increased electoral positions for women, reaching a critical mass of 33% as recommended in BPfA. To-date, Rwanda holds 46%, the highest percentage of female parliamentary representation;
- Further, Presidents and heads of governments of the African Union (AU) have demonstrated their commitment to promoting gender equality by taking a decision that promotes gender parity as a principle for all actions of development in Africa.
- The protocol that establishes the newly formed Pan African Parliament (PAP), of which I am its first president, requires a gender and political diversity. This has ensured a minimum of one third women representation in the parliament.

Despite the many examples of positive actions being taken world-wide, of which you are aware of, there still remain a lot of hurdles to be overcome which include:

- Trafficking of women;
- Women becoming victims of armed conflict;
- Women lacking basic services such as health, education and legal services;
- Laws and traditional practices which continue to deny women their rights;
- The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS which mostly affects women.

The present commitment of the world to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda will reinforce the implementation of the BPfA within the following 8 goals:

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achievement of universal primary education
3. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Reduction of child mortality
5. Improvement in maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development

The MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action have close similarities. The MDGs reflect the widespread international acknowledgement that empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality are matters of human rights and social justice. Of the 8 goals drawn up, Goal 3 is a crosscutting goal to all the MDGs, that is, it is mutually reinforcing. Attempts to achieve the MDGs without promoting gender equality will both raise the costs and decrease the likelihood of achieving the other goals. The reverse is equally true; achievement of Goal 3 depends on progress made on each of the other goals. In addition, MDGs contain time-bound targets for holding governments and international institutions accountable and have broad support of the 191 UN member states, UN Agencies and the international trade and financial institutions which have all committed to the 2015 deadline. From these observations, one can find that it is now more than ever before that the gender space for dialogue has been widened, and therefore a golden

opportunity for BPfA. The MDGs can be seen as another avenue for monitoring the implementation of the BPfA and other key international agreements.

The UN review of the MDGs will take place in September this year. These events provide an opportunity to work pro-actively to bring women's perspectives back into the forefront of dialogue in national and global arenas.

In doing so, there's a need to address specific areas which will accelerate the implementation of the BPfA.

Role of Women in Leadership

- Celebrating women in leadership and creating mentors
- Education for girls-quality of education for a globalised world

Defining of Emerging issues from a Gender Perspective

- The peace and security issues (from passive victims to active participants)
- Globalization- (an opportunity or trap?; economic empowerment of women; women creating a global understanding)
- International trade (Creating a global trade union for women)a
- Eradication of abject poverty especially in developing countries
- Application of ICT
- Investment and creation of capital by women (The informed and economically empowered woman for the new revolution)

In dealing with the issues, we would be careful not to renegotiate or to re-open the debate and the already accepted principles towards the liberation of women. In order to appreciate the results of the initiatives taken in different parts of the world and build on them for further actions, the focus of Beijing +10 should be directed towards: stock taking, evaluation, documentation and sharing of the success stories and obstacles experienced. Through such exercise, Beijing +10 can be an opportunity to see and fill the gaps. Beijing +10 should therefore be a process of self evaluation and determination to move forward. The BPfA put us on the highway, what we need is refueling and acceleration of speed with women at the steering wheel.

I thank you for your attention.