



*American Model United Nations*

## **Commission on the Status of Women**

### **On Eradicating Poverty, including through empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world**

#### **I. Women's Representation in Decision-Making**

The Commission on the Status of Women recalls the monumental ideals and initiatives committed to by participating member states in the Beijing Conference Platform for Action. The objective of the Platform for Action is to empower women and advance their rights in all facets of politics and society. The full realization and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women is essential for their empowerment. The Commission recognizes the primary duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and social systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to further their commitment in advancing the rights of women.

A decade later, the Commission commends the concerted effort by member states to implement the recommendations set forth in the Platform for Action. In September of 2000, members reinforced their commitment to Beijing +10 through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During fall 2003, the UNGA Resolution on "Women and Political Participation" gained 110 co-sponsors. This resolution reaffirmed basic principles on women's participation and empowerment. Furthermore, in February 2004, the UNGA met and passed Resolution A/Res/58/206 further promoting the role of women in decision making, the use of legislation and the support of women's grass roots efforts. This resolution further suggests practical measures that governments and civil society actors can take to achieve these goals.

Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, there has been a noticeable trend in realizing the recommendations put forth in the Beijing Platform for Action. Results of the conference can be specifically seen in the participation rate of women in all facets of society, especially government and business institutions. NGOs and organs of the United Nations System such as UNIFEM and UNDP have facilitated the goals of Beijing +10 and the MDGs. UNIFEM in collaboration with ECLAC commissioned six gender assessments in Latin America, which analyzed the MDGs from a gender perspective. Results included the creation of national advocacy programs that are being used to promote gender mainstreaming in national women's organizations throughout the region.

#### **II. The Feminization of Poverty**

Poverty is a multidimensional issue, resulting from structural imbalances in all realms of life including the state, the society and the economy. Women are disproportionately represented among the poor and structural adjustment loans have exacerbated these inequalities. The impact of user fees is rarely gender neutral and in many cases, the willingness to pay for and administer education or healthcare is biased in favor of boys and men. Studies have shown that structural adjustment policies have led to reductions in household incomes, increases in food prices, and cut backs in health services which have contributed to the deterioration of women and children's nutrition and increased mortality rates in many countries. We invite regional development

institutions to apply gender-sensitive social impact assessments of structural adjustment programs to overcome negative effects of these policies and ensure that women do not bear a disproportionate burden of transition costs.

Wage gaps and discriminatory hiring practices against women continue to be a significant contributing factor to the poverty of women in both the developed and developing worlds. The wages paid to women continue to be only 90 percent or less of what their male counterparts earn. Throughout the global community, women consistently experience significant barriers to their entrance and advancement in the workforce. Women face inferior pay and working conditions compared to their male counterparts. Designation of women as primary caretakers and men as wage earners contribute to women's disempowerment. The challenge for the global community will be to eradicate gender stereotypes and discrimination in careers and wage labor, while creating additional opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility throughout different industries and professions.

The eradication of poverty through the empowerment of women is important to the United Nations and has been re-affirmed through the Millennium Development Goals. Our aim, therefore, should be to eradicate poverty and empower women by removing gender wage gaps and improving work conditions and opportunities. We recognize that the initiatives taken toward a globally integrated economy have led to an increase of export oriented manufacturing in developing countries by 14 percent from 1980-1999. Additionally, women have come to comprise most of this expanding workforce. The conditions and wages in the manufacturing sectors are crucial to the current status of women. Poor working conditions in various sectors have adversely affected women. Transnational corporations have voluntarily become signatories to agreements which dictate basic standards. However, a universal agreement is yet to be created. Recognizing that 2005 has been designated as the International Year of Microcredit, microfinance has been shown to promote financial self-sufficiency in the domestic private sector and to create possible sources of wealth for low-income people. The majority of microcredit programs have been directed toward females, strengthening their role as decision-makers and allowing women to escape poverty by providing them with the ability to meet basic needs. While microcredit may not be appropriate in all settings, in the cases where it is not, grants or infrastructure improvements must be promoted. Microfinance programs should also work toward introducing women to diverse employment opportunities. Greater impact assessment is still needed, focusing on the effects on women.

### **III. Education and Empowerment of the Girl Child and Women**

Recognizing that education plays a vital part in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, there is initial need to provide wider access to educational services to all girls and women at all levels. Girls continue to be denied access to education due to inadequate resources, social norms (i.e. sex preference in education and separate sphere ideology), and geographic challenges. Since the ratification of the Beijing Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and its additional recommendations, many member states have successfully developed education and training programs specifically for women. Youth development programs and reform of educational systems have helped in women's education and empowerment. Non-

governmental organizations have assisted in program development and implementation, especially in less developed states. Many member states continue to face economic barriers due to structural adjustment policies and global trade inequalities that hinder the capacity of member states to further develop and implement such initiatives. In order to deal with these barriers, focus on educational programs must also include alternative education or training programs that can reach out to girls and women in rural and indigenous communities, women in poverty, and those women denied access to formal education due to cultural beliefs and/or stereotypes. These programs are necessary not only for the education of the girl child, but also for adult women in contributing to overall female empowerment in communities and institutional frameworks.

Mainstreaming gender is of great importance in the education of the girl child and woman. With the United Nations leading this initiative, member states, regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations have been working to address the effects on both genders in formulation and implementation of policy. Specifically, this means removing gender biases from education and training and providing equal access to educational curriculums and information for both men and women. The separation of gender in education and the continued barrier of gender bias and stereotypes in educational systems only serve to hinder the empowerment of women. In recognizing the differing concerns of member states at varying levels of development, educational focus will likely vary from region to region, state to state. Member states should recognize the situation of women as an issue of global concern and seek to advance this issue in both formal and informal educational settings. Educational focus should include discussion not only on the basic needs of literacy, but on health education and training for women's work outside of the home. Women are twice as likely to be infected with AIDS than men, innovative approaches to spread awareness of sexual and reproductive health are necessary in all countries. A lack of awareness of these issues contributes to increased population growth, high rates of infant mortality, and continued violence against women. Women's access to higher education and/or job training programs has a great effect on labor and market dynamics in all member states. As women are denied access to primary and secondary education, their informal contribution to the labor market is ignored.

Denying educational access to women has allowed for persistence of gender bias and stereotypes adversely affecting women and girls. Development is not only an economic issue, but entails human development and, at its core, education. As countries continue denying women's educational opportunities, they hinder possible advancement. Member states promoting women's education and participation in formal structures benefit from varying perspectives in decision-making and increased protection and promotion of women's rights. Access to education and training is an important step in promoting the empowerment of the girl child and woman and will contribute to increased participation of women in decision-making and formal and informal social structures.

In reviewing the current status of women on today's international stage, the Commission recognizes that our goals have not been entirely fulfilled. The Commission recommends:

1. All member states to strengthen the capacity and leadership of women in organizations and networks by continued financial assistance to UNIFEM and NGOs with similar

- initiatives and political support of their operations;
2. All member states to forge new partnerships among women's organizations, national and local governments, the United Nations and the private sector;
  3. All members states to continue to legislate, strengthen and enforce laws that protect women and promote the empowerment of women;
  4. All member states to implement primary and secondary education curriculums with more emphasis on women's higher educational opportunities and the economic and social advantages they bring;
  5. All member states to advocate the strengthening of gender equality programming of the UN operations agencies already in existence, with the hope that by creating a sense of equity we will see women's full and equal participation;
  6. All member states to work toward gender equality in the labor market, recognizing the need for fair and equal wages, level working conditions, and equitable opportunity;
  7. International financial institutions and member states to recognize that men and women experience poverty differently and thus to mainstream gender into economic policies;
  8. For the international community to recognize and assist in overcoming infrastructural barriers such as access to rural areas, financial resources, and institutional organization, that prevent complete dissemination of services promoting the education and empowerment of women of all ages;
  9. All member states to acknowledge societal differences and varying levels of development in expectations of policy development and implementation, particularly dealing with women's life cycle and role in communities.