



AN OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE BEIJING +10 APPRAISAL AND REVIEW

To President of the United States, George W. Bush
and to Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice,

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 expresses the common aspirations of women from around the world.

Therefore, we were pleased to learn that your representatives have affirmed the commitments made by the United States to take positive action toward implementing the strategies and realizing the goals outlined in that document.

However, we have serious concerns about the equivocation of your representatives toward both the language of the earlier commitments as well as toward the binding nature of the commitments themselves. In particular, we object to the "Explanation of Position" presented at the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting of December 14-15, 2004, which calls for rolling back advances in international human rights law made under the aegis of the BPFA.

As scholars, teachers, and students at U.S. colleges and universities, allies and members of the National Women's Studies Association, we understand the value of freedom of thought and of expression as a means of realizing human potential. As a professional organization founded in 1977, NWSA strives to bring about "a world in which all persons can develop to their fullest potential and be free from all the ideologies and structures that consciously and unconsciously oppress and exploit some for the advantage of others." The right to define one's own identity and aspirations lies at the very heart of this quest.

Therefore, on the occasion of the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to Review and Appraise implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), we stand in solidarity with our sisters globally to assert the full range of our human rights, including the rights to bodily integrity, sexual autonomy, to form families of one's choosing without coercion, and to an environment clean enough to support healthy lives not just for ourselves but for all the generations to which we might give birth.

We call upon you, President Bush, and on you, Secretary Rice, to demonstrate our nation's commitment to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action by

- a) ensuring that U.S. foreign policy reflects respect for and compliance with those international human rights treaties to which the U.S. is already a party (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention Against Torture);
- b) adopting leadership roles in promoting U.S. ratification of those human rights treaties which have not yet been ratified by the U.S. Senate (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, The Convention on the Rights the Child, and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers); and
- c) endorsing and creating a federal program to adequately fund human rights education in all public elementary and high schools.

Prior to the Fourth World Conference of Women, the United States Department of Labor in conjunction with national women's organizations convened a series of regional preparatory conferences to elicit local knowledge about the status of U.S. women and hear their concerns. The information gathered from these meetings informed the actions and statements of the U.S. delegation to the conference in Beijing.

Prior to formulating the United States official response for the Commission on the Status of Women's 49th session to review progress on the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action, no such process or similar wide ranging efforts to gather information from reliable sources at the local level was attempted. Nor were high level experts at the various research centers, such as those affiliated with the National Council for Research on Women, convened. As a result, the document submitted for this historic occasion overlooks key developments and offers only the most inadequate statistical evidence for its claims.

As researchers, teachers and students, we endorse the free exchange of information as fundamental to the pursuit of truth and social advancement. Our well-being as U.S. residents depends on the willingness of our governmental representatives to fully cooperate in the exchange of data and best practices, and in strategizing how to best remove existing barriers to women's full participation in society, both domestically and in countries around the world.

The consensual language of the Beijing Platform for Action and other international documents drafted in the context of the United Nations and its adjunct agencies provides a resource for formulating policies and domestic legislation that foster the self-determination of women in society. We therefore affirm the Platform for Action as the basis for continued coordinated international activism and legislation.

Furthermore, we commit ourselves to continuing to publicize information about the World Conferences on Women, the United Nations Decade for the Advancement of Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and other United Nations programs and structures addressing the situation of women and advancing women’s status through our own teaching, scholarship, and organizing. We would like to be proud of what we report about our government’s role in these endeavors.

We, the undersigned, ask you, Mr. President and Madame Secretary, to join us in forthrightly and unequivocally affirming the Beijing Platform for Action and to use the power of your offices to serve the world by leading us in fulfilling the human rights aspirations of all women and their allies.

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Return signed petitions no later than March 5, 2005 via fax (617-994-4278) or post to: Laura Roskos, Center for Women’s Health and Human Rights, Suffolk University, 41 Temple Street, Boston MA 02114-4280

Learn more & follow petition development at: <http://ase.tufts.edu/womenstudies/news/beijing%2010%20petition/index.html>

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