

In View of the Review

By Aileen Familara and
Angela Santos-Deldoc

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) conducted a 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in March 2005 in New York. The review focused on the achievements, the gaps and challenges in the implementation of the BPFA (in 1995) and the "Beijing+5 Political Declaration" taken from the five-year review in June 2000.

Isis International-Manila conducted an interview of some women representatives from women's organisations in the Asia-Pacific region who attended the March 2005 BPFA review. The women were asked about their own (and their organisations') previous Beijing experience, their perspective of the Beijing+10 (B+10) review; and their view of the "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)" in relation to the B+10 process.

The Women We Interviewed and What They Say About Beijing

- **YEVGENIA KOZYREVA**, representative of Feminist League (Almaty, Kazakhstan), a national organisation established in 1993 working on the promotion of the equality of women and men in all spheres of life: economic, political, social, cultural and within the home.

Beijing Minus 7 Plus 3

by Everjoice J. Win

The first group of women I ran into were wearing green military uniforms. They were all in their late teens, chests out, shoulders back, with the kind of arrogance that only youth can exude. Their young shoulders were weighed down by badges and medals. Is this the new face of the women's movement? This was Beijing+10 but in New York, February 28 to March 11, 2005. We were there to take stock of achievements since the "Fourth World Conference on Women," held in China in 1995. It was certainly not Beijing—the city, its magic, and what I remembered from 1995. For starters, it was freezing cold, and it numbed your brain. Muted, too, was the energy and vibrancy of that memorable conference where over 10,000 women came together to demand "equality, development and peace."

In 1995, the "Beijing Platform for Action," the closing call to arms with its 12 critical areas of concern, became our key reference text. Beijing also developed a deeper meaning in public discourse. "Ah, you are one of those Beijing women? We are now scared of you," men and government bureaucrats would say, with smiles on their faces. Some meant it as a joke. With most, you could smell

the deep worry. Women had arrived. We had become a political entity. So much hope, so much promise.

After Beijing, we celebrated because many governments took seriously women's participation in decision-making processes. On the African continent, South Africa and Rwanda show us that it can be done. Rwanda now has the world's highest number of women in its national legislature. Yes, that Rwanda. There is cause for celebration. The Southern African Development Community came up with a declaration setting a minimum target at 30% by 2005. As one activist commented in 1997, they probably thought 2005 was very far off! Yet millions of women still don't get to choose their own governments. In Saudi Arabia, women were not allowed to vote in their recent elections because of what we were told were "technical hitches." Even though millions of poor women have never seen a computer, let alone have access to a public phone for use in emergencies, the explosion of information and communication technologies has given women's organisations new tools with which to link with one another. Internet and e-mail have brought women closer, cutting down costs of

Logo, NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95

meetings and conferences. But the information revolution has also brought pornography into everyone's personal computer. Naked young girls have become mobile phone screen savers. It is now easy to buy and sell women on the net. And in Southern Africa, AIDS has claimed the lives of thousands of black women of reproductive age. Women bear the brunt and the burden of the epidemic. Responses have yet to get to grips with fundamental women's human rights questions over sexual violence, inheritance, access and control over property, and women's control over their own bodies. Kwa-Zulu's answer is to test young women for virginity. King Mswati has seen lots of "progress" since Beijing. He now has more than a dozen wives, and he gets the new ones tested for HIV so they don't infect him. In New York, we could not even put this outrageous issue on the table. An Afghan *mullah* has declared: "A woman belongs only in two places; the house or the grave." Nobody has an accurate figure of women lying in graves after domestic violence. And the Pentecostal Bush Administration says there is nothing called "sexual rights."

"Beijing what? You are still on that? We have moved onto the Millennium Development Goals

now," a government bureaucrat remarked at an Africa Union meeting. The Millennium Development Goals. Those neat indicators of change. Gender equality is measured through girls' access to primary schooling for example. They are not a "move on" from Beijing. We thought everyone now knew that a few years of primary schooling are not enough to liberate a woman. Those not committed to fundamentally changing the status quo love the Millennium Development Goals. They are short and simple, and they don't require a major shift of resources, attitudes, and practices. Yet even they are far from being achieved. Millions of girls still do not have access to education because the fees are too high, parents do not think that education is important, the road to school is long and dangerous, or there are no toilets for them to use. And we have not thrown yet into this mix, the violence from teachers and boys that girls often experience.

We were in New York not to celebrate Beijing but to defend it. This was not a world conference but a mere session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Things are bad when we have to fight to downgrade our needs to one slice instead of half a loaf. And the U.S. Young Marines in their military regalia showed us why.

On B+10 Review

- It's very difficult to get attention in this process (especially B+10) because it's more of an official process, a formal process. For the NGOs, it is very difficult to expect or determine what change will materialise after this meeting. But I think that after the B+10 declaration (document) is distributed, and we have talked about it in our country, maybe things will then become clearer than now.
- I don't know but human rights are not right everywhere. It's not for us. And I think that the B+10 process is a presentation of our needs, of women's needs from all over the world and from our region.

On BPFA and MDG

- We did a research about the MDGs in our country before this conference. The government might prepare the MDG report about equal rights of women and men. Our NGOs are too weak (do not have enough resources) to prepare for future projects and the implementation of the BPFA and the MDGs. We must now connect with government to integrate our efforts.
- **NURGUL DJANAIEVA**, regional coordinator of the Forum of Women's NGO of Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), a women's network organisation working for women's advancement and information exchange, including development of strategies for the implementation of the BPFA in Kyrgyzstan.

On B+10 Review

- First of all, we were, of course, quite worried about whether the reaffirmation (of the BPFA) will come up finally, and with full implementation. And it is now obvious that there is a risk in that UNCSW declaration, that there is a strong opposition to the reaffirmation and full implementation from the Holy See and from the U.S. Thus, it is expected that this kind of conflict would appear. But still my expectation was that we would get from the government strong support to continue working on the BPFA without any changes and with full implementation.
- But now from this point, I think that it is important for us also to start initiating those resolutions that will address our special needs. This year, the special resolution was on the tsunami. But we also see that in the past years. When our countries like the socialist countries were facing tremendous challenges and tremendous losses in many aspects, these concerns were not addressed by any UN meeting. There was no special resolution on women's losses during the transition period of some governments.

Somebody thought it was a good idea to bring in these young women. To learn? To sell U.S. policy? Their presence was such a poignant reflection of where we are. This is 2005. It is the age of U.S. unilateralism and militarism. September 11, 2001 fuelled the flames. This is the age of religious (and other) fundamentalisms. The secular state, to which we look for protection of our rights, is under threat. Women's rights organisations had to lobby hard to ensure that the Platform for Action was not re-opened for discussion. Not with Bush in the White House, and the UN's future under threat. There was only a one-page statement issued and signed by governments at the end of the meeting, and that one page was heavily contested. But we still hold on to the

promises of Beijing even though everyone agrees not much has been achieved. There has been too much of the proverbial one step forward, two steps backward, although many of us returned home with our personal Platforms for Action intact. If nothing else, women are now able to remind the world and ourselves that we are a political force to be reckoned with. ☺

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