

What do Dutch NGOs think about a 5th World Conference on Women in 2015? Joint recommendations to the Dutch government

The Hague, 12 July 2012

Introduction

On March 8 2012, the Secretary-General H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, and the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, jointly launched a surprising proposal to convene a Fifth UN World Conference on Women in 2015. They referred to "the enthusiasm of civil society, particularly women's organizations", and therefore also expect broad support for such a conference. Voting on a resolution yet to be submitted to the General Assembly will take place in the autumn of 2012.

Dutch NGOs, just as their international umbrella organizations and partners, had been silent about a 5th World Conference on Women until then. In early April they had expressed their concerns about women's rights being under attack internationally and renegotiations over earlier agreements established within the UN framework in the *statement of Women's Organizations on the very limited and worrying results of the 56th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women* (see Annex).

On 21 June, forty women came together, some on behalf of Dutch and international organizations and others as individuals, collectively representing a broad spectrum. They discussed the opportunities and risks of a 5th World Conference on Women and alternatives for Beijing + 20. They also discussed recommendations to the Dutch government, which will adopt a position at the General Assembly.

Based on these discussions the following considerations have been agreed upon and formulated by a broad-based writing group.

Recommendations to the Dutch government

To summarize: yes, provided. Agree to a 5th World Conference on Women, or another Beijing + 20 process only under very strict conditions, as listed below.

- Use as a starting point in the UN process, and in particular the decision on Beijing + 20, that the adage "women's rights are human rights" (Vienna 1993), the language and the agreements of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) are **non-negotiable**.
- Make it clear in the discussion about the form of the Beijing + 20 process that for real improvement in the position of women, not new language, nor more words, but more **fervour and commitment** are required. From (supra) national, regional and local governments, NGOs, old and new partners, such as the corporate sector, that has to give substance to a gendered social and sustainable corporate social responsibility.
- Be open to **alternatives**: All kinds of creative ideas for a mobilizing and energizing process towards the momentum of Beijing + 20 in 2015 have been circulating - a symbolic burning torch carried across the world as at the beginning of the millennium, a five-week campaign, or a ten-day rally, similar to the activism regarding violence against women. In the different regions, such a process should be so designed that women's organizations, local groups,

women from marginalized groups, younger women, and boys and men working towards gender equality are involved.

- Without **transparent monitoring** of the implementation of existing conventions, resolutions and international agreements such as the BPfA, with concrete targets and time frames, improvement in the position of women will remain by and large an exercise on paper in the UN framework as in recent years. Strive therefore to achieve (agreements on) good, evidence based, reporting on all twelve critical areas of concern from the BPfA and some emerging issues.
- Facilitate **shadow reports** by civil society (women's) organizations, possibly in conjunction with shadow reports on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), through bilateral contacts, embassies and interdepartmental coordination.
- Focus: partly as a result of the credit crunch, shrinking and stagnating economies, budget cuts are the order of the day throughout the world, whereby women are often the first to be adversely affected. These budget cuts are one of the reasons that UN Women still does not have the required funds demanded at its founding, and still cannot have all the pledged resources available to it. In this context a costly UN world conference process with lots of paper and talk and a heavy burden on the budget of UN Women is inopportune. A **special session of the General Assembly** to focus on the critical areas of concern and the emerging issues will be much more effective.
- Do not put Dutch money in “paper and talk”, make sure that funds are available to the **women concerned**. Make this clear to other donors, too.
- Fulfil - as so often in the past with regard to women's rights, human rights, and gay rights - a **leading role** also in the European context, both strategically and substantively. Initiate consultation with “like-minded countries” worldwide, including in the G77.
- Provide cross-pollination and **guarantee women's rights and gender mainstreaming** in the other UN + processes, such as Cairo + 20, Resolution 1325 + 15 (involving women in peace processes) and the new international framework for sustainable development as a follow-up of the current MDGs (Millennium Development Goals of the UN). Place the debate over what form Beijing + 20 should take within this framework.
- Continue – in keeping with UN tradition – to invest in **dialogue with civil society** and in particular with women's rights organizations. Be **inclusive** hereby: Involve also diaspora organizations and other ethnic, migrant and refugee organizations. Consult not only Dutch NGOs but also the FLOW partners (“the women’s fund” of Dutch development cooperation) on positions to be taken regarding a 5th World Conference on Women, or another variation of Beijing + 20. Insist on the importance of the involvement of and cooperation with civil society in a European and international context.

Finally, on 21 June we not only formulated recommendations to the government, but also “recommendations to ourselves”. These are included in the report and will be fleshed out further in the follow-up process.

The NGOs would have liked to exchange ideas on the pros and cons of a 5th World Conference on Women with the government delegation to CSW 56 (Commission on the Status of Women) during the usual debriefing meeting in April. The delegation did not provide this opportunity for reasons best known to itself. NGOs find (de)briefing meetings extremely valuable and look forward to future meetings.