## **Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

Division for the Advancement of Women



Agreed Conclusions
of the Commission on the
Status of Women on the
Critical Areas of Concern
of the Beijing Platform
for Action 1996-2009



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# **Contents**

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Introduction  | 1    |
| Fortieth session (1996)   | 5    |
| Resolution 40/9. Implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical area of concern: poverty | 7    |
| Agreed conclusions 1996/2. Women and the media  | 13   |
| Agreed conclusions 1996/3. Child and dependant care, including  |      |
| sharing of work and family responsibilities   | 16   |
| Forty-first session (1997)  | 21   |
| Agreed conclusions 1997/1. Women and the environment  | 23   |
| Agreed conclusions 1997/2. Women in power and decision-making   | 27   |
| Agreed conclusions 1997/3. Women and the economy  | 31   |
| Agreed conclusions 1997/4. Education and training of women  | 36   |
| Forty-second session (1998).  | 41   |
| Agreed conclusions 1998/I. Violence against women   | 43   |
| Agreed conclusions 1998/II. Women and armed conflict  | 49   |
| Agreed conclusions 1998/III. Human rights of women  | 55   |
| Agreed conclusions 1998/IV. The girl child  | 61   |
| Forty-third session (1999)  | 69   |
| Agreed conclusions 1999/I. Women and health   | 71   |
| Agreed conclusions 1999/II. Institutional mechanisms  | 79   |
| Forty-fourth session (2000)   | 87   |
| Forty-fifth session (2001)  | 89   |
| Agreed conclusions 2001/5A. Women, the girl child and human   |      |
| immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome   | 91   |
| Agreed conclusions 2001/5B. Gender and all forms of discrimination,   |      |
| in particular racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance                             | 100  |
| Forty-sixth session (2002)  | 109  |
| Agreed conclusions 2002/5A. Eradicating poverty, including  |      |
| through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle, in a  |      |
| globalizing world   | 111  |

| Agreed conclusions 2002/5B. Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters  |
|---|
| Forty-seventh session (2003)  |
| Agreed conclusions 2003/44. Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.          |
| Forty-eighth session (2004)   |
| Agreed conclusions 2004/11. The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality   |
| Agreed conclusions 2004/12. Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding  |
| Forty-ninth session (2005).   |
| Fiftieth session (2006).  |
| Agreed conclusions. Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work |
| Agreed conclusions. Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels   |
| Fifty-first session (2007)  |
| Agreed conclusions. Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child  |
| Fifty-second session (2008)   |
| Agreed conclusions. Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women  |
| Fifty-third session (2009)  |
| Agreed conclusions. The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS  |
| Annex I. The Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women, 1996-2009.  |
| Annex II. Expert Group Meetings organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women on the themes under consideration by the   |
| Commission on the Status of Women   |

## Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Council established the Commission on the Status of Women in June 1946. The Commission reports directly to the Council, and through the Council to the General Assembly. The Commission, which originally had 15 members, grew in several stages to its current size of 45 members. The allocation of seats is based on a formula designed to ensure balanced geographical representation.

In its resolution 11 (II) of 21 June 1946, the Council determined that the Commission would have two basic functions: to prepare recommendations and reports to the Council on "... promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields," and to make recommendations "... on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights."

From its establishment in 1946, the mandate of the Commission remained relatively unchanged until 1987, when it was expanded to include advocacy for equality, development and peace. The Commission was also charged with monitoring the implementation of internationally agreed measures for achieving equality between women and men, and reviewing and appraising progress at the national, regional, and global levels.

The Commission meets annually for a period of 10 working days. It stimulates exchange of experience, lessons learned and good practice at the national level, in particular through interactive expert panels. The work of the Commission is supported by the Division for the Advancement of Women, within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The role of the Division is to prepare background documentation, provide substantive servicing of meetings and conferences, assist in the formulation of policy recommendations, and monitor follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the Commission.

The principal output of the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women is the agreed conclusions on one or more priority themes. Agreed conclusions contain an analysis of achievement of the goals related to the priority themes and a set of concrete policy recommendations. The recommendations, targeting Governments, the United Nations system, other international organizations, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, focus on actions to be taken at the international, national, regional and local levels.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1995, the General Assembly mandated the Commission to integrate a follow-up process to the Conference into its work programme, regularly reviewing the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to develop its catalytic role in mainstreaming gender perspectives in United Nations activities. The Economic and Social Council again modified the Commission's terms of reference in 1996 to include, inter alia, identifying emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting equality between women and men.

In 1996, on the basis of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission adopted a work programme for the years 1996-1999 focused on monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The successive annual sessions of the Commission were devoted to follow-up on the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, at its forty-fourth session in February and March 2000, the Commission focused on preparations for the five-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", in June 2000. The General Assembly adopted by consensus a "Political Declaration" and "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action". The outcome documents identified achievements, obstacles and challenges in the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action; and actions and initiatives to overcome obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Commission developed a multi-year programme of work for the period 2002-2006 at its forty-fifth session, in 2001.<sup>4</sup> This work programme provided a framework for assessing progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the special session of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was carried out by the Commission at its forty-ninth session in 2005. The Commission adopted a declaration in which it reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the

Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.96.IV.13) chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> General Assembly resolution S-23/2.

General Assembly resolution S-23/3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Economic and Social Council resolution 2001/4.

Introduction 3

outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and emphasized that full and effective implementation was essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It called upon all stakeholders to commit themselves fully and to intensify their efforts towards implementation. The declaration also recognized that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women.

At its fiftieth session, in 2006, the Commission revised its methods of work, and decided to focus on one priority theme annually based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, with agreed conclusions as the outcome of the consideration of the priority theme. The Commission also decided to evaluate progress annually in the implementation of agreed conclusions from a previous session, and to continue to examine an emerging issue. It adopted a multi-year programme of work for the period 2007-2009.<sup>5</sup> A subsequent multi-year programme for work, covering the period 2010-2014, was agreed upon at the fifty-third session of the Commission in 2009.<sup>6</sup>

The year 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Commission accordingly decided to review at its fifty-fourth session the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, with an emphasis on the sharing of experiences and good practices, so as to overcome remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals.

This volume compiles the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission between the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the 15-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2010. While these agreed conclusions focused on various priority themes, a number of overarching issues were consistently highlighted. The importance of gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women was, for example, emphasized in all of the agreed conclusions of the Commission. The agreed conclusions also recognized that the implementation of each critical area would be advanced through the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. The Commission further stressed that a holistic and comprehensive life-cycle approach should be applied to the implementation of all criti-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9.

Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15.

cal areas, and has consistently called for the promotion of gender-sensitive research and the development of methodologies for the collection of statistics disaggregated by sex.

The agreed conclusions identified the major obstacles to implementation and the most urgent measures needed to ensure full implementation of each of the critical areas of concern. Among the common challenges to the implementation of all 12 critical areas of concern were, inter alia:

- Limited participation of women in decision-making processes;
- Lack of human and financial resources;
- Persistence of gender stereotypes.

In its agreed conclusions, the Commission also highlighted the need for efficient and close collaboration between all actors: Governments, the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector, at the national, regional and international levels, in order to achieve the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Commission further called on all entities in the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions to contribute to implementation within their respective mandates and to improve coordination at all levels, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their policies and programmes in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain the global policy framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The agreed conclusions adopted at the annual sessions of the Commission reaffirm the commitment of Governments to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

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