

NGO CSW-Geneva: UN ECE Regional Review
Roundtable 8) Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
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Top-Down and Bottom-up: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women Plus Feminist Movements in Civil Society Can Do Together what Neither can Accomplish Separately

Research Conclusions: “Women’s autonomous organizing in civil society affects political change. Autonomous movements articulate the social perspectives of marginalized groups, transform social practice, and change public opinion. They drive sweeping policy change as voters, civic leaders, and activists pressure policy makers to respond to their demands and as policy makers themselves become sympathetic to the movement’s goals. These effects of autonomous organizing are more important in our analysis than women’s representation inside the legislature or the impact of political parties. Nor do economic factors such as national wealth trump the societal causes of policy making. (Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005” American Political Science Review, August 2012. An unprecedented study that tracked violence against women policies and women’s mobilization in 70 countries.)

I come here as an advocate for a 5th UN World Conference on Women and Forum which would be the means of generating awareness and compassion for the current status of women worldwide including new issues since Beijing. It would bring NGO women leaders together, many of whom were not in Beijing twenty years ago because they were children then. Many women leaders who went to Beijing, are now elders, others have since died. It is still possible for intergenerational collaboration and transmission of experience, especially if women at the Forum meet each other in circle conversations. The Regional assessments of the Beijing Platform for Action are expected to be spotty, with progress and regression regarding implementation, and for sure the world does not acknowledge that “Human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights.”

“Given that women make up half of humanity and given the importance and relevance of women’s issues for global progress, it is high time that such a world conference be convened.” These are the words of Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and the president of the General Assembly in a Joint Statement International Women’s Day, March 8, 2012 as they urged the General Assembly to convene a Global Conference on Women. The last was held in Beijing in 1995. In their statement, they noted that this conference could tackle emerging issues since Beijing, which would include implementing UN Security Council Resolution #1325 (2000), equal access to decent work, aid effectiveness, food security, trafficking, drugs, migration, environment, climate change and information technology, all of which impact on women.

The Secretary General’s request for a Fifth World Conference on Women (5WCW) has not been withdrawn, nor has it been taken up. One member state can bring it to the table again. The hope is that India be that member state. On India's Independence Day, in his first major address (August 14, 2014), Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the need to stop violence against women and India's rape culture. For him to take the lead and propose that 5WCW be held in New Delhi in 2018, would support his words and the

women of India. In 2008, on becoming UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon initiated UNITE to end violence against women and girls: from the UNITE website: "This vision can only be realized through meaningful actions and ongoing political commitments of national governments, backed by adequate resources." This is Top-Down vision, which can result—as it has—in progressive, compassionate documents and principles, which then are not implemented unless there is Bottom-Up pressure that generates political will at the top to follow through.

Historical gains made by women the world over, demonstrate a principle that recent research strongly validates: women gain rights in a world where power is held mostly by men only when those at the top are motivated by feminist movements that come from the bottom up. In India, when women took to the streets to protest police disregard of rape, it generated the political will to make and enforce laws to protect women. A study of four decades (1975 -2005) of data collected in seventy countries (Htun and Weldon, 2012) found that it was grassroots feminist movements -- not liberal politics, not women's representation in government, not national wealth, that makes a difference: only strong feminist movements are able to voice and organize around their top priorities as women. Otherwise, women are sidelined or subordinated to men's needs or to the priorities of institutions or political parties.

Why hold 5WCW in India? India has the most active grassroots women's movement in the world now and a new government whose prime minister has made stopping violence against women a priority. Holding 5WCW and Forum in New Delhi would provide information, inspiration and effective ways of stopping violence and empowering women that would spread worldwide. An estimated 100,000 women would attend, and their spending would be a boost to India's economy. 40,000 women came to Beijing for the Forum, they learned from each other, networked, formed friendships, mentorships, and political alliances. Relationship is the basis on which women empower and inspire each other, the means through which women's organizations and movements grow.

Plans through 2030 call for high-level and regional meetings to review the Beijing Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals, create new documents and goals. **None will be able to mobilize grassroots women, or provide the emotional and political impact of a 5WCW and Forum, which is essential to implement goals to do with women.** It has to be UN sponsored for many attendees to get visas, and it needs to inspire individuals and organizations with the financial means to recognize and support young women leaders and honor elders from developing areas. Like a scholarship or fellowship, the equivalent would honor altruism, and activism-- "sisterships" through which young women would have financial and relationship support to attend. It could bring together councils of wise women-elders, NGOs concerned with similar problems would find individuals in them share values and visions. The result would be development of grassroots leaders. Women understand "mother's agenda," to provide for every child, what each mother wants for her own child. Research found that women have a "tend and befriend," response to stress, an oxytocin or bonding hormone response as they talk over the situation and possible solutions, while men do "flight or fight," and isolate or become aggressive, which is an adrenaline + testosterone response. To stop violence against women and the ripple effect from home to neighborhood to world, requires mobilizing grassroots women and political will of the leadership at the top. If India offers to host a UN 5WCW and the General Assembly authorizes the conference Bottom up and top down activism will come together in New Delhi within three years.

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