

43rd session of the Human Rights Council

High-level panel discussion commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women

Accelerating the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Concept note (draft as of 7 February 2020)

- Date and venue:** 25 February 2020, 9 - 11 a.m., Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva
(live broadcast <http://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** The high-level panel discussion will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The panel discussion will provide a space to celebrate the vision of women's rights as human rights articulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, recall the progress made in the past 25 years towards its implementation, discuss the continued relevance of this visionary document to address remaining and new challenges and accelerate progress towards the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all women and girls.
- Chair:** H.E. Ms. Elisabeth TICHY-FISSELBERGER, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statements:**
- Ms. Michele BACHELET, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
 - H.E. Mr. Jeppe KOFOD, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark
 - H.E. Mr. CHEN Xu, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland
- Panellists:**
- Ms. Phumzile MLAMBO-NGCUKA, Executive Director of UN-Women
 - Ms. Bandana RANA, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
 - Ms. Sonia MONTAÑO VIRREIRA, Author and former Director of the Division for Gender Affairs at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (TBC)
- Outcome:** In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 42/14, the High Commissioner will submit a summary report on the proceedings and issues addressed during the panel discussion to the Human Rights Council at its forty-fifth session and to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.
- Mandate:** In its resolution 42/12, the Human Rights Council decided to convene, during the high-level segment at its forty-third session, a high-level panel discussion to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, with a particular focus on the implementation of the the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of its review conferences, as well as on achievements, best practices and challenges in this regard.
- Format:** The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists' presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).
- The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel discussion and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise

issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Accessibility: In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the event will be made fully accessible. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcasted. In Room XX, four seats are reserved for participants using wheelchairs, in the seventh (last) row. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Accessibility focal point at the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the “Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities” (available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>).

Background: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted unanimously by representatives from 189 countries at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 held in Beijing, China. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action laid out a vision for ensuring women’s human rights and achieving gender equality around the world.

The Declaration builds on the results of the previous three world conferences on women¹, as well as other global conferences held in the 1990s, such as the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1995. The Beijing Declaration is considered the most comprehensive expression of States’ commitments to human rights and gender equality.

The Beijing Declaration committed States to protecting and promoting the human rights of women and girls and acknowledged the importance of “the voices of all women everywhere”, taking note of the diversity of women, their roles, and circumstances, and honouring the women who inspired hope and paved the way ahead for the world’s youth.²

The Declaration also determined to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or disability, or because they are indigenous people.³

The Platform for Action includes a series of strategic objectives to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and achieve gender equality. It involves political and legal strategies for gender equality and women’s advancement on a global scale.

Since 1995, the world has witnessed tremendous progress: the number of women in the work force has increased; two in three countries have achieved gender parity in schooling at the primary level⁴; between 2000 and 2017, the maternal mortality ratio declined by almost 38 per cent⁵; and more women are now in leadership positions and governments talk about women’s rights as human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes women and girls’ human rights and gender equality as indispensable for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, the global landscape has changed since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted 25 years ago and the world is still far from the vision of Beijing. Approximately

¹ Previous World Conferences on Women were held respectively in Mexico City in 1975, in Copenhagen in 1980 and in Nairobi in 1985.

² United Nations, Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, paras. 4 and 31.

³ Ibid. para. 32.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report: Building bridges for gender equality (2019), p. 7.

⁵ World Health Organization, Maternal Mortality Key Facts (2019).

one in three women throughout the world experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.⁶ Less than a quarter of parliamentarians in the world are women.⁷ In over 50 countries there is no legal protection for women against domestic violence. 830 women and girls still die daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.⁸ About 750 million adults – two thirds of them women – remained illiterate in 2016.⁹ All of our societies remain affected by harmful gender stereotypes that at best limit women's and girls' opportunities and at worst condone or justify violence and discrimination.

Furthermore, new challenges threaten human rights and gender equality, including a rise in natural disasters, conflict, and social inequities. The commitments made in Beijing 25 years ago remain more than ever relevant to protect human rights and gender equality.

2020 is a crucial year to reinvigorate national and global efforts to accelerate the implementation of commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and thus its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Human Rights Council and its mechanisms have provided guidance as to the application of gender equality standards – including as articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – engaged in a dialogue with States, civil society organizations and other relevant actors, thereby contributing to the advancement of women's human rights and gender equality at the national and international levels.

The high-level panel discussion will:

- Recall the vision articulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that women's rights are human rights;
- Celebrate the progress made in the past 25 years towards its implementation;
- Discuss the continued relevance of this visionary document to address remaining and new challenges and to accelerate progress towards the full realization of women's and girls' human rights;
- Discuss the role of the Human Rights Council in continuing to support the realization of women's and girls human rights.

The high-level panel discussion will be one of a series of events to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Background documents:

[Human Rights Council resolution 42/14](#) of 26 September 2019 entitled "Marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (*adopted by consensus*)

United Nations, [Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#), Beijing, 4–15 September 1995 (*document includes the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*)

⁶ World Health Organization (WHO). 2019. RESPECT women: Preventing violence against women.

⁷ UN-Women, Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation.

⁸ WHO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women & The World Bank Group, "Survive, Thrive, Transform - Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030), (2018).

⁹ United Nations. (2019). Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Report of the Secretary General (E/2019/68).