



## Recommendation 1716 (2005)<sup>1</sup>

# Promoting a United Nations 5th World Conference on Women

Parliamentary Assembly

1. On 4 March 2005, the United Nations commemorated thirty years of its efforts to promote gender equality. The 1st World Conference on Women (WCW) was held in Mexico in 1975, and marked the start of the “UN Decade for Women”. However, it was not until 1995, when the 4th WCW was held in Beijing, that the issue of gender equality became a high-profile issue for the UN. The Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in Beijing marked the transition from the concept of the advancement of women to that of promoting equality between the sexes, something which requires the participation of both women and men, and of society as a whole. Accordingly, the Beijing Platform for Action required governments, the international community and civil society to take strategic action in 12 critical areas.

2. Unfortunately, as early as the “Beijing +5” review process held in New York in 2000 at the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, it was apparent that governments were lagging behind in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The “Beijing +10” review process held in New York in March 2005, downgraded to a technical evaluation within the framework of the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, made clear that there was not only a lack of implementation but also a lack of political will to change this status quo.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that this is not the right moment to give in to “gender equality fatigue” and complacency or to give up on the Beijing Platform for Action and its important goals. The reality of the situation of women in the world today is alarming and in some areas even worse than in 1995. The backlash against women’s rights and gender equality has taken many forms :

- 3.1. a surge in domestic violence and gender-based violence in general, including egregious violations of women’s human rights through so-called honour crimes, female genital mutilation, trafficking, forced marriages, “gynocide” and other such abominable practices ;
- 3.2. the targeted victimisation of many women and girls in armed conflicts ;
- 3.3. a reluctance (if not downright refusal) to allow women to adequately participate in decision making, be it in the political and economic spheres or even in the family ;
- 3.4. a reinforced tendency to stereotype gender roles to the detriment of women’s liberty to freely choose how to lead their lives ;
- 3.5. gender preferences for boys (and ensuing neglect of girls) with increasingly worrying demographic implications in some countries ;
- 3.6. a bitter debate on reproductive health issues, especially abortion.

4. While renewed vigour in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action may help to combat some of these ills, it should not be overlooked that by now, ten years after the last WCW, many new challenges have emerged which were not covered in 1995. These challenges range from the rising impact of the HIV/ Aids epidemic on women and women’s access to new information technology to trafficking in human beings and the targeted victimisation of women in armed conflicts. To be effectively faced, these international challenges require a concerted worldwide effort and new political impetus.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 1 September 2005 (see [Doc. 10643](#), report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur : Mrs Err).



5. The Assembly considers that only a new WCW can bring about the required worldwide effort and political impetus, and that the organisation of such a conference is, in fact, overdue. However, a renegotiation of the Beijing decisions needs to be precluded : the 5th WCW should be called to deal exclusively with the new and emerging challenges to women's rights and gender equality.
6. Some of the topics the 5th WCW should deal with are :
  - 6.1. violence against women, especially gender-based and domestic violence, including trafficking in women and girls, forced marriages, so-called honour crimes, "gynocide", female genital mutilation and rape ;
  - 6.2. protection against governments which violate or do not adequately protect the human rights of women ;
  - 6.3. HIV/Aids, in particular the spread of the epidemic to women and girls ;
  - 6.4. women's access to decision making in all spheres, including in conflict prevention and resolution ;
  - 6.5. stereotyped gender roles and gender preferences, leading to discrimination against women and neglect of girls ;
  - 6.6. protection against media organisations which treat women as merchandise ;
  - 6.7. women's access to information and communications technologies and their impact on women's day-to-day lives.
7. The Assembly thus recommends that the Committee of Ministers :
  - 7.1. promote a United Nations 5th World Conference on Women, excluding the possibility of reopening the Beijing Platform for Action for debate, to take place no later than the year 2010 ;
  - 7.2. invite the governments of the Council of Europe member states to support this initiative ;
  - 7.3. organise a preparatory European regional conference no later than the year 2007.
8. Moreover, the Assembly encourages its members to take appropriate action in national parliaments in order to promote the holding of such a conference.