

Asia-Pacific governments must address gaps in global policy framework on gender equality and women's human rights, say 400 women activists from across the region

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More than 400 women activists from the Asia-Pacific region call on governments to meet their obligations to uphold women's human rights this week, ahead of an intergovernmental meeting on gender equality convened by UN ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand.

The collective statement comes from the [Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum on Beijing+20](#), which from 14-16 November brought together feminist women activists to discuss and put together recommendations for the 20-year review of the [Beijing Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#). The BPfA is a global policy framework for the advancement of women's human rights and gender equality, and is currently undergoing review by States in the run-up to the 20th anniversary of the framework next year.

Over the past few days, representatives from Asia-Pacific civil society organisations have been looking into whether reported progress by States has been sufficient, and what States should be doing to tackle the remaining challenges in the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the BPfA. The outcome document from the forum makes recommendations to the governments that will meet this week in Bangkok for the [Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review](#).

Women activists highlighted the need for governments to provide information and guarantee consultation processes with women's organisations as means for accountability. They reiterated that States should promote women's participation in political spaces, in particular the participation of those women that are traditionally marginalised. Women also expressed the importance of engaging with regional mechanisms to advance women's human rights in the region.

"The governments that are meeting are going to be negotiating on our rights, on our lives," said an activist from Sri Lanka. "It is crucial that our voices are strongly reflected in the statement that they will finalise."

The civil society outcome document outlines the need to address violence and discrimination against women, including migrant workers, sex workers, women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, women living with HIV, women with disabilities, and women human rights defenders.

The document includes key issues linked to the economy and the environment and its interconnection with development, poverty, trade, and labour and land rights. It adds the need for governments to take action to address the specific situation of women in poverty, rural women, indigenous women, and women refugees. It also calls to end violence against the girl child, including sexual violence and early marriages.

Women expressed the need for States to decrease military spending, end militarisation and increase the accountability of extractives industries and multinational corporations. Women also included recommendations on emerging issues in the region, such as the impact on women of private and State development projects.

The outcome document also includes the input from 13 briefing papers on crucial issues. Below you will find the key messages from the briefing papers.

Notes to editors:

- Interviews with activist representatives from the Beijing+20 Civil Society Forum are available. To arrange interviews or for a copy of the outcome document, please contact: Cai Yiping, Media Liaison, on caiyiping2000@gmail.com / +86 1350101073; or Jasmin Qureshi, Media Liaison, on jasmin@gaatw.org / +66940567281
- The [Beijing+20 Civil Society Forum](#) took place from 14-16 November in Bangkok, Thailand. For daily updates, photos and more information on the event please visit www.bit.ly/apcsob20
- The meeting of governments from across the region, the [Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review](#), will take place at UN ESCAP in Bangkok from 17-21 November. Representatives of civil society organisations will attend the meeting to lobby on the outcome document recommendations.

Key messages

Abortion—There is a need to guarantee safe and legal abortion in the region and decriminalise this practice. Government should eliminate social, cultural, structural, and religious barriers to access abortion and guarantee that it is part of public health policies and health care services.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)—Women have a right to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). CSE should be specifically mentioned in order to guarantee that young women have their

sexual rights upheld and to guarantee that they have agency and choices. CES should cater to formal, informal and non-formal education systems.

Economic environment and role of the private sector—There is a need for accountability mechanisms for transnational corporations and better regulation of the private sector. There should be efficient development assistance and an analysis of macro economic policies. States should address the structural causes of economic inequalities.

Equal right to inherit land—It is essential that governments state that the right to inherit land is a fundamental right. There is also a need to clarify that this right includes equal access and control over land and not just the ownership.

Families—Language on the family should be less restrictive. Governments should use the Beijing language, which includes issues such as diversity in families and sharing of responsibilities.

Human rights and development—There is a need to mutually reinforce aspects of both. Development should include substantive equality and non-discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should be the backbone of development policies for women. “Development is a matter of obligations.”

Inclusion of women’s rights organisations and feminist organisations—There is a need to recognise the work done by feminist groups on women’s human rights issues and they should therefore be included.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights—There is a need to use this language and to include the definition of SRHR adopted in the 2013 Asia Pacific Population Conference, including child, and early age marriages.

Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)—Women of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities continue to face violence and discrimination that affect various areas of their life. The review of the International Conference on People and Development (ICPD) recognised this as an issue in 2013. There is a need to have a stand-alone paragraph on SOGI.

Unpaid care work—There is a need not only to recognise this issue but to have a commitment to redistribution for paid work and the reduction on the burden on women and the value of care work.

Women and climate change—There is a need for clear language on climate change. States should reiterate the Rio Principles and other key principles, such as differentiated responsibilities and binding agreements and comprehensive documents on negotiations on climate.

Women and conflict—The following strategic areas should be put forward: i) participation of women in conflict resolution and decision-making processes; ii)

limit on military expenditure; iii) sub-national conflicts; iv) violations and redress to women survivors of conflict; v) early and forced marriages.

Women and HIV—There is a need to address and protect the rights of women with female sex workers, who are most at risk in the region. There is continuing stigma and discrimination in health settings and existing compulsory HIV testing. Women with HIV are also subject to force sterilisation, contraception, and abortion. Women with HIV should have the right to control their own sexuality and decide freely and responsibly on issues of their sexuality.