

## Considerations pro and contra the convocation of a 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in 2015

In 1995, almost 20 years ago, the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women was organized by the United Nations in Beijing, which – culminating the achievements of its predecessors – initiated **substantial changes** at the national and international level. These comprise the dynamic development of the self-confidence and the self-esteem of women and girls of all strata and all over the world, the enhancement of solidarity and communication among them and increasing efforts to reorient national and international law from a comprehensive gender perspective.

Against this background **strategies** aimed at combating women's poverty, and overcoming all barriers against their empowerment within the political, social, economic and ecological sphere, as well as strengthening the protection of their human rights and establishing and promoting public institutions and agencies for the advancement of women and girls were adopted.

The Austrian WIDE Working Group "Beijing Follow Up, Globalisation and Empowerment of Women" has been pleading for years for the convocation of a 5<sup>th</sup> Women's Conference. Last but not least, because of the fact, that it would be particularly important for the **younger generation**, to witness the direct international exchange and the initiation of relations inspired by solidarity which were the characteristic features of the former Women's World Conferences and the parallel NGO forums.

However for the time being, the members of this group are expressing **concerns and doubts** regarding the success of such an event. These are based on the increasing opposition of several states, determined by religious (Islamic and Christian) conservatism, against all women's rights oriented initiatives, thereby provoking conflicts, as in the case of the CSW session 2012 which ended without any consensual concluding document.

The fact that versus the end of the above mentioned meeting, the Secretary General and the Head of the General Assembly of the UN officially proposed the convocation of a fifth World Conference on Women – obviously without having contacted UN Women – met with astonishment even among former advocates of such an idea. All the same, **discussion** on this topic has started within and among governments and non-governmental organizations at the national and international level.

At the international level the **NGO platform 5WCW** (<http://5wcw.org>) is particularly active in supporting the performance of such an event, a proposal which has also been welcomed by several NGOs from the Islamic region. On the other hand, there are **critical objections** raised all over the world - e. g. by official and NGO delegates at the CSW 2012, or at the AWID Forum in Istanbul in April 2012, or by some Southern partners of Austrian development cooperation – inspired by apprehensions regarding a backlash in the field of women's rights on the one hand and the integration of gender and women's issues into neo-liberal economic policies on the other.

### Preconditions

Against this background WIDE Austria has formulated principal considerations and requests which should characterize attitudes regarding the performance of a fifth World Conference on Women.

- The **Beijing Platform for Action** (BPfA) represents the irrevocable foundation and point of departure for all consultations in the framework of a fifth World Conference on Women and **must by no means be renegotiated**. This was an epoch-making document and an irrevocable precondition and obligatory guideline for future women and gender policies of governments all over the world.
- In substance, emphasis should lie on strategies, possibilities and examples of “good practices” to allow progressive changes concerning the situation of women in times of **multiple crises** and for the enactment of **alternative economic, social and ecological thinking and acting**. Focal issues like decision making power of women in national and international financial and economic fora, social security, care-work, food security and food sovereignty, improvement of the social position and recognition of women in rural and urban regions and gender-oriented measures to counter-act climate change could be treated in this context.
- The allocation of **financial resources** for the implementation of the above mentioned policies should be seen as a priority (Pledging Conference).
- **Misogynous concepts and strategies** must be **confronted** explicitly. In this context the negative role of the Vatican as observer is to be critically examined, and respective statements should be rejected.
- In the context of the consultations for the agenda-setting and the negotiations, **neo-liberal thinking** must not be taken into consideration and any respective formulation must be avoided.
- As far as the organization of the Conference is concerned, **additional resources** for planning, administration, personnel, costs of residence, support for NGOs in all phases of dealing with the event must be provided.
- Comprehensive measures must be taken to secure the **participatory involvement of NGOs** in the negotiations of the Conference, to enable them to organize preparatory and parallel events which are reflected in the official negotiations, and to furthermore guarantee fair accreditation procedures, access to members of delegations, consultation chambers, documents etc. for them.
- The Conference must be performed in a **country** which highly values and demonstrably enforces the protection of human rights in general and of women’s rights in particular.
- The insights and conclusions of this Conference must be integrated into the **entire work of the United Nations**, for instance into reviews of the implementation of the MDGs and the Post-MDG Process.

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