



# Beijing+20

## Looking Back and the Road Ahead

Reflections on Milestones in Women's  
Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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*Cover photo: UN Photo - Participants at the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum meeting held in Huairou, China, as part of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China on 4-15 September 1995.*

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# Preface

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**I**n celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20), it is time to take stock of what has been done and what more must be done to achieve the full and equal participation of women in decision making in political and public life. The cusp of Beijing+20 coincides with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that calls for women's leadership in conflict resolution and peacekeeping and the eve of the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals.

The Middle East Program (MEP) and the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) at the Wilson Center would like to mark Beijing+20 by rededicating our efforts to advancing women in public service and aligning our endeavors to Chapter 4, Pillar G (number 7) of the Beijing Platform for Action, which states:

*Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. In this respect, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.*

In order to reflect critically on Beijing+20 and what more must be done to close the gender gap in decision making, MEP and WPSP are proud to share pieces from women who have been instrumental in realizing the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action in different parts of the world.

We hope to submit this publication to the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015.

# Revisiting the Beijing Declaration

Haleh Esfandiari

*Director, Middle East Program, Wilson Center (United States)*

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**A**s we celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, we celebrate the progress women around the world have made since 1995. But we remain concerned about the regression of women's rights in a number of countries and societies. We have witnessed concerted efforts in some countries to include women in the decision-making process; but we have also seen that in a number of other countries, rights gained by women are being eroded.

Activist women around the world will always remember the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The Beijing Declaration that resulted from that conference became a blueprint for most governments around the world to follow.

And we all remember the dramatic moment in Beijing when the first lady of the United States, Hillary Clinton, announced: "If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that human rights are women's rights... And women's rights are human rights."

For two decades those words have been echoed by women around the world; they became the basis for changes in the status of women in some countries and resulted in seven UN resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), and the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations did what it was supposed to do—it pushed gender issues to the front of its deliberations—but the follow-up and implementation of the declaration was left to individual governments.

The story of women's rights in the last two decades has been a mixed one—a story of progress, stalemate, and regression. If we look around the world we see that the Beijing Declaration did not necessarily lead to full participation of women in decision making, nor did every country embrace, as one hoped, the quota system favoring women. Not every constitution around the world recognizes women as equal citizens. Not every government has signed, let alone ratified, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women.) Despite UNSCR 1325 and despite all our efforts, violence against women is not only common in times of war, but it is also prevalent in times of peace. Women's bodies are often considered spoils of war and negotiable. Women are hardly ever invited to peace negotiations, although they suffer equally, if not more, from the consequences of conflicts. UNSCR 1325 is not implemented.

The Beijing Declaration could have resulted in full or at least partial inclusion of women in leadership positions. For a brief period after Beijing, developing countries, including countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, were moving toward the greater integration of women. They began to revisit strict family laws based on the *shari'a* and to appoint women to judgeships and ministerial and leadership positions. In some cases, the private sector followed this example. In a number of countries women were allowed to run for and be elected to parliament. Education became equally accessible to women and men. Women's access to employment expanded, even if women's employment continued to lag behind men's employment. A crack opened in the door and women were able to put a foot in and push the door open a bit wider. They were invigorated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW, and UNSCR 1325.

In the MENA region specifically, a number of governments took some remedial steps but very cautiously. For example: the age of marriage for girls was raised in some countries to 16 and even to 18, women were granted the right to seek divorce, and polygamy became difficult or impossible. These were incremental steps. And the efforts of women in the MENA region received international recognition. Two Middle Eastern women won the Nobel Peace Prize—Shirin Ebadi of Iran in 2003 and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen in 2011. The Nobel Peace Prize this year went to Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, underlining the importance of education for girls and women.

These were laudable developments—but they are not enough. The MENA region continues to be characterized by a high rate of illiteracy and unemployment among women, low levels of women's political participation, and a limited number of women in leadership positions. Moreover, the region is today plagued by political turmoil and incipient civil war. Religious bigotry and extremism are on the rise. As always, women and children are the first victims of extremism. Twenty years after Beijing we still need mechanisms to make a reality of all the articles of the declaration and of UN resolutions related to women that were passed since Beijing. Despite progress, we still need to find ways to provide women with safety and security, opportunities for education and employment, and an environment in which they can develop their full potentials. Otherwise the road ahead for women will continue to be difficult and hopeless.

# Delivering on the Promise of the Beijing Platform for Action

Rangita de Silva de Alwis

*Director, Women in Public Service Project of the Global Women's Leadership Initiative,  
Wilson Center (United States)*

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**I**n every generation there is a call to action and this generation must rally to close the gender gap on leadership. The anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action takes place at a historic moment when communities are coming together to reimagine a new world order: a global development framework for our time.

An extraordinary confluence of events—the Beijing+20 review, the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals, and the anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325—creates the perfect moment to deliver on the promise made in Beijing 20 years ago.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms the right of equal participation in government. The Beijing Platform for Action's critical area of concern on Women in Power and Decision Making states:

“Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.”

The participation of women in decision making in government is critical for transparency, accountability, and sustainability of good governance. More and more evidence-based research shows that women's participation in the formal sector is one of the single most powerful levers of social, economic, and political transformation. Twenty years after the Beijing Platform for Action and its call for 30 percent of national legislative seats to be held by women, only 38 countries have reached this critical mass. Despite the fact that women account for more than 50 percent of the population, the world average of women in parliament stands at 21.8 percent. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women have been less than three percent of peace treaty signatories and less than 7.6 percent of negotiating parties. It is no wonder that of the 300 peace accords signed post-Cold War, only ten address sexual abuse of women.

During the past two decades much progress has been made in the rhetoric on women's rights; currently 139 countries articulate gender equality in their constitutions. The low representation of women in leadership in public office, however, remains one of the most pervasive problems in every community and every country in the world.

While women are underrepresented in decision making in both the public and the private sectors, women's unequal representation in decision making in government renders the government complicit in an unequal distribution of power.

An equal process shapes a more equitable outcome. Equality in political decision making performs a critical leverage function—without which it is unlikely that policies will be equitable. From sanitation to security, public service has the most intimate and powerful impact on our lives. Furthermore, public service has enormous constitutive and normative power. Changing cultural and social norms is one of the most intractable challenges of our times. Public service has the single most powerful moral authority to transform unequal power structures and deep-seated social and cultural norms.

It has been said that the unequal representation of women is history's greatest shame. The time has now come to renew our promises made in Beijing and crystallized in the Beijing Platform for Action. We cannot wait two more decades to make real those promises.

# A Call for Women's Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Roza Otunbayeva

*Former President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Founder of the Roza Otunbayeva Initiatives Foundation (Kyrgyzstan)*

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**G**lobal development is proceeding as if it were in a spiral. While dozens of countries, some as part of a former superpower, were at enviable levels of human development, new conflicts and challenges emerge that echo what humanity has previously overcome with great difficulty and losses. For these reasons, the capacity of states to face contemporary challenges is particularly important.

Women have clearly taken up new roles as decision makers in many countries. This is no passing fad; the exigencies of challenges facing the world are beyond those which only men can tackle. Often serious conflicts occur where the roles of women leaders are critical, indeed central, to addressing the conflicts. This has been demonstrated several times around the world over the past half century by strong leaders in dresses. However, the generations to come will face even greater challenges before this century is over.

It is therefore imperative to ensure education for all girls at the same level as boys in all corners of the world, regardless of poverty. The traps laid to bar women from full participation in social, political, and economic life—including cultural sensitivities that block the advancement of girls, such as early marriage, denial of education, or social norms that keep women at home—need to be removed. We need to find ways to create conditions whereby a young woman can determine her own fate and choose her own profession or walk of life. This, in turn, calls for teaching girls leadership skills. I know from my own country how many women leaders make their various collectives and communities stronger by teaching and enlightening not only their families but their nations as a whole.

A woman is even keeled, naturally reserved, and just as she treats her children equally, so she is an even-handed leader in society. In a time of often aggressive capitalism, society has a particular need for the things that women often have intrinsically: a feeling of fairness, sensitive trustworthiness, and rational discipline. This is why women are currently increasing their presence in the governments of countries around the world. Pulling up their sleeves and acting with patience, they seek to respond to the needs of societies tired of the rule of men, which is constantly based on force and extreme competition. Women, along with other vulnerable parts of society, do not sit and wait for manna from heaven but rather

work, seek solutions, and think about how to mobilize their ability and potential to secure development. Take the example of millions of women on all continents rising up before our eyes, building their incomes and their families on a daily basis through microfinance.

We need to resolve all issues of development to eradicate poverty and to end the conflicts around the world before the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To undertake these major global issues, there needs to be an equal push from both men and women. Humanity's progress can be secured only through the equal participation of women and men. I am certain that this century will have us witness the emergence of superb models of women's leadership in governments across the planet. We are rising up—the preconditions are ready—and what we need is to tirelessly and relentlessly go forward.

# The Great Unfinished Business of the Beijing Platform for Action

Ambassador Melanne Verveer

*Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (United States)*

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**T**wenty years ago, I joined then-First Lady Hillary Clinton on a trip to Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was there that she declared, for all the world to hear, that “human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights.”

Women globally have made significant progress in the last 20 years: more girls are in school than ever before, maternal mortality is decreasing, and women’s economic participation is growing. Laws have been enacted to combat violence against women, but, still too often, they are not enforced and policies are not implemented. Women are also frequently shut out of political leadership. Despite the undeniable progress, much remains to be achieved for women and girls to enjoy full equality—not just on paper, but in reality. This discrepancy that divides rhetoric from reality is not just a women’s issue. Research and experiences show that when women and girls progress, all of society progresses.

Our world is plagued by dozens of armed conflicts that threaten the safety and security of millions of men, women, and children on a daily basis. Women and girls bear a disproportionate toll. Rape is a strategic tool of war, and women are sidelined in the processes where decisions are being made about them and their families. It is essential that women have a place at the table in peacemaking and that they actively participate in peacebuilding.

We also know that economic prosperity is critical to peace and security. Women represent 80 percent of the global purchasing power, and investing in women helps to grow economies and stabilize communities. Our economic progress as a global community will stagnate if women remain disempowered, disenfranchised, and excluded from decision-making positions in governance and the economy.

Including women’s voices and perspectives in peacemaking ultimately helps entire societies reconcile, rebuild, and achieve a just and lasting peace. Yet, women are consistently underrepresented in peace processes. Of some 39 active conflicts over the past 10 years, women have made up only [4 percent of peace negotiation teams](#). Moreover, only [16 percent of some 585 peace treaties drafted in the past 20 years contain references to the critical](#)

[role of women](#). This exclusion is not only shortchanging women, but also undermining peace and security.

As we mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Platform for Action adopted at [Beijing in 1995](#), and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the passage of [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) and the establishment of the [Millennium Development Goals](#), let us renew the commitment to women's progress and a better world that these pronouncements represent. We have yet to fully realize their objectives and so we must seize the moment to do more.

Growing women's political decision-making capacities and opportunities, especially in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, remains the great unfinished business of the Beijing Platform for Action. This will require innovation, collaboration, and determination, but I believe that by working together—in government, civil society, and the private sector—we can create progress and level the playing field. It is our collective responsibility to fulfill the promise we made 20 years ago, that women's rights are human rights, once and for all. We cannot settle for anything less.

# Should the Drafters of the Beijing Platform For Action Rejoice?

Ambassador Moushira Khattab

*Former Minister of Family and Population of Egypt, former Vice Chair of the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, and former Ambassador to the Czech Republic and Slovakia and South Africa (Egypt)*

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**T**he story of Beijing+20 is one of good news and bad news. A serious review of the milestone that is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is warranted now more than ever. In the absence of renewed commitment for concerted and accelerated action, threats like ISIS—which take women back to square one—could represent a deadly blow to Beijing’s objectives.

Progress has not been even. Women’s participation in decision-making bodies has lagged behind progress in health and education. Stereotyping and implicit biases result in women holding less than 20 percent of national decision-making positions.<sup>1</sup>

Only seven percent of the gender gap is being closed in the Middle East—the lowest worldwide. Egyptian women have led the struggle for equal rights. Although Egyptian women were the first to become members of parliament in the mid-1950s and ministers in the 1970s, Egyptian women’s political rights have since varied based on the will of political rulers. Women’s parliamentary seats have fluctuated, peaking in 2010 under a quota of 64 seats but then declining again to less than 2 percent in the dissolved Islamist parliament of 2012. The same holds true in government: women represented 12.12 percent of the cabinet in January 2011, decreased to 3 percent within the same year, and increased again to 11.4 percent. Quotas are, therefore, not sufficient in isolation. A comprehensive national action plan on women’s empowerment is essential. Women need to be weaned off assistive measures such as quotas, and women in decision-making bodies should not be held hostage to rulers’ whims.

The Arab Spring resulted in increased political participation of women—both formal and informal—forcing change and monitoring its path. It did not, however, result in more involvement of women in decision-making processes.

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<sup>1</sup> WEF Gender Global Gap Index (2013)

Despite setbacks, Egyptian women have emerged stronger and continue to force themselves onto the political scene. Their stands against sexual harassment and violence, participation in writing the 2014 constitution, and role as a voting block are testaments to this strength. The constitution provides for a 25 percent quota for women in elected local councils. Solid affirmative action programs aimed at improving women's participation in decision making are crucial.

The constitution obliges the government to ensure gender equality and implement international conventions on human rights. The next battle for Egyptian women is to ensure the constitution is implemented in letter and spirit. The world must realize that including women in decision making is a fast track to eradicating dictatorship, poverty, corruption, and political Islam, which denies women their existence altogether. The Taliban, Boko Haram, ISIS, and the Muslim Brotherhood are all different brands of the same product. Their exponential growth symbolizes the failure of the international community to honor the Beijing Platform for Action and live up to its commitment to further the cause of women's rights—particularly empowering women in key decision-making positions worldwide.

# Why Women Must Participate in Decision Making

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala  
*Finance Minister of Nigeria (Nigeria)*

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**T**wenty years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action asserted that ensuring greater representation of women in political decision-making processes is a sure means of leveraging real and sustainable development. As a firm believer in this assertion, I have spent a great deal of time in my professional career and personal life working toward the achievement of this goal.

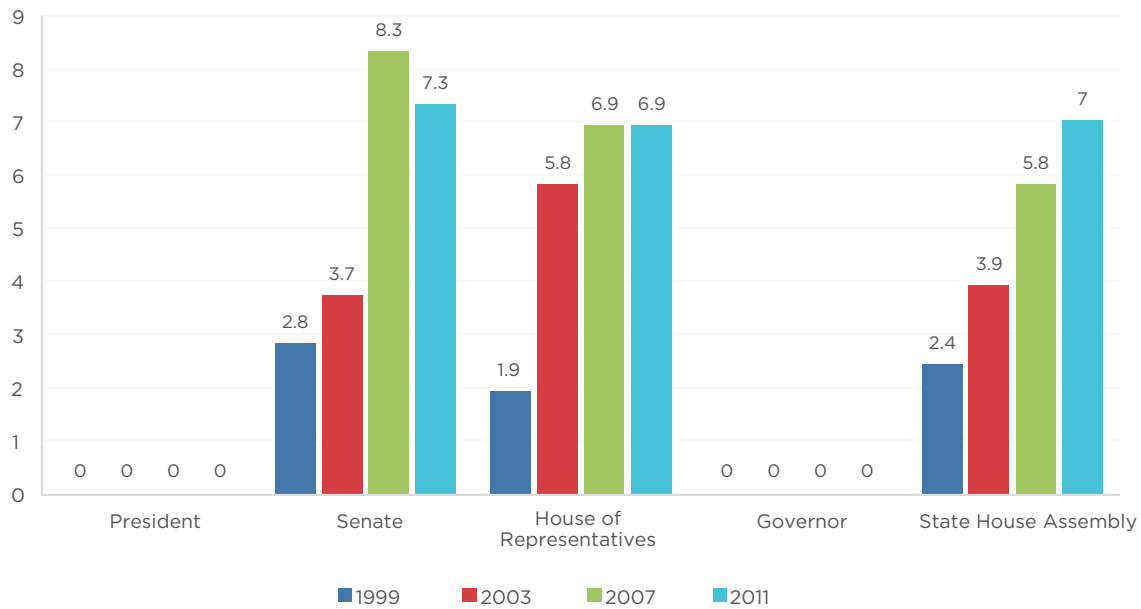
Women's participation in politics is of strategic importance, not only for women's empowerment but also because it has wider socio-economic benefits and impacts. Evidence suggests that disadvantaged groups can obtain fair representation only if they are present in elected assemblies. Where women are more broadly represented, resource allocation is more effective and, ultimately, superior human development outcomes are produced.

The global average for women in parliament is only 22.2 percent.<sup>2</sup> Africa's average of 22.9 percent, although promising, is undoubtedly helped by countries like Rwanda and Uganda that have instituted quotas. In Nigeria, women held 32 percent of strategic appointed positions between 2011 and 2013, which is unprecedented in the country. Women hold key decision-making roles in finance, petroleum resources, communications technology, and environment, among other portfolios. In finance we have used the fundamental instrument of the budget to deliver specific results for girls and women in five key sectors of the economy—agriculture, communications technology, health, water resources, and public works—through a program known as G-Win (Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria).

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<sup>2</sup> UN Women's *Women in Politics: 2014 Situation on 1 January 2014*: women heads of state: 5.9 percent; women heads of government: 7.8 percent; Women Speakers of Parliament: 14.8 percent; female deputy speakers: 26.5 percent.

### Women's Elective Representation in Nigeria 1999-2011 (%)



Source: Gender in Nigeria Report 2012

Appointive positions cannot, however, effectively replace elective representation in parliament. Evidence from countries like South Africa and Rwanda, which have increased women's participation in politics, suggests that party and constitutional quotas are the most successful means of increasing women's representation. Until women candidates are nominated at the party level to contest winnable seats, equity in gender representation will be slow and may be unachievable in the short term.

While creating a more enabling environment for women to participate in and win elections will make a difference, making politicians more responsive to all their constituents will improve accountability in politics. Currently just over half of all registered Nigerian voters are women. This number has to translate into strong representation through sustained advocacy, mobilization, and collaboration.

To drive effective use of resources for equitable and sustainable change, women, as well as men, should be represented at decision-making levels—locally, regionally, and globally.

# The Underrepresentation of Women in the Decision-Making Process

Lakshmi Puri

*Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women (United Nations)*

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**T**he Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted in 1995 by 189 governments in the context of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Twenty years after, there is still a need to ignite global discourse and renew political commitment to accelerate the implementation of this comprehensive affirmation of women's rights and empowerment. In the critical area of Women in Power and Decision Making, despite progress, women remain severely underrepresented across a range of leadership positions in both the public and private sectors, including as heads of state and heads of government.

The Platform for Action specifically called on governments to set “specific targets and implementing measures” including by means of “positive action.” Those temporary special measures in the form of quotas—reserved seats and legislated candidate quotas—have accelerated the strides made in women's political representation in the Americas, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab states. In these regions, the magnitude of change is around 10 percentage points over the past 20 years. Much slower progress has been seen in Asia and the Pacific, where the use of quotas has been less prevalent.

A second driver of change has been the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the preparedness of international organizations and donors to fund activities aimed at achieving Millennium Development Goal Three (MDG 3), which aims to promote gender equality and empower women. The global monitoring of progress toward MDG 3, as well as strong mobilization by civil society organizations (CSOs) through campaigns such as 50/50, has challenged governments to implement measures aimed at improving women's political participation. At the same time, international organizations and donors have seized this momentum to support governments and further consolidate and strengthen change.

Despite recognizing progress, country level reviews of the Platform for Action continue to indicate that more needs to be done. Political institutions need to address the structural barriers to women's equal participation in decision making. They also need to shift the focus from women as the primary group responsible for achieving gender equality outcomes

to the institutions in which they participate. Related to this, the relationship between women decision makers and gender equality advocates should be strengthened and institutionalized.

We recognize the value women's voices bring to the decision-making table. As we seek to institute more democratic governance around the world in the new generation of sustainable development goals—including the gender equality goal—women's voices, leadership, and representation must be granted on an equal basis as men. Men throughout the world cannot claim to represent women, just as no single woman can claim that she can represent all women. Women are half the world. Our goal is to increase their leadership, participation, and influence in public decision making in all areas of civic engagement.

# “We The People”

Tara Sonenshine

*Former Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Professor, George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs (United States)*

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**“W**ho are WE?” Does the modern day meaning of “we” imply an acceptance of the equal value of women in society? Have “we” ensured that half the population—women—are fully included in all arenas from politics to economics, from international affairs to public service? WE have work to do.

Now is the right moment to look back and look ahead at how far we have come from a male-dominated world to a “we”-dominated world. Think back over the past 20 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. We have made great strides in terms of raising the issues and focusing global attention on women and girls, but the numbers still do not add up in terms of representation of women in the United States Congress—still under 20 percent—and in terms of representation of women in peacebuilding around the world. Fewer than 10 percent of peace agreements in the world are negotiated with women at the table.

America needs to lead on this issue. Our nation rests on pillars of individualism and pluralism. We believe deeply in community and communal ideals, and we hold dear the right of each individual to achieve his or her God-given potential. When it comes to women and public service, we want to lift up all women and girls just as we want every woman and girl to find her own path to greatness.

“Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they’re never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent,” said former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright to the National Democratic Institute. She reminds us that “we” are over 50 percent of the world’s population, but “we” continue to be underrepresented as voters, political leaders, and elected officials.

Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains underrepresented in the political arena. Let’s get busy.

# Combating Violence against Women and Children

Marta Santos Pais

*Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children  
(United Nations)*

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**A**lmost 20 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and as the world commemorates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), millions of girls continue to struggle for their rights, including their protection from discrimination and violence.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing proclaimed the human rights of women and the girl child as an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. Thanks to the unprecedented mobilization triggered by the Fourth World Conference on Women; gender equality, women's empowerment, and the elimination of violence against women and girls have gained ground in governments' agendas. Paradoxically, the tremendous visibility achieved has not been followed by resolved action to address persisting concerns, and progress remains desperately slow. Still today, killings and violence—including harmful practices—committed against girls continue to be ignored, silenced, and condoned. In an era defined by globalization and a communications revolution, women and girls continue to be absent from critical decision-making processes and are hardly visible in public and political life. As a result, humankind's capacity to realize its ideals is seriously undermined. Indeed, a society that accepts violence and discrimination as a norm or fate hinders social progress and threatens peace, in particular when those excluded account for half of the population. Yet prominent women and girls—often survivors of extreme forms of violence—continue to champion this cause and remind us that their voices cannot be silenced and their dreams and ambitions cannot be resisted. Malala Yousafzai represents a wonderful and forceful example.

In my work as Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, I remain deeply committed to preventing and responding to violence against girls. I am also committed to mobilizing action and support to address its root causes and its impact on individual victims and society as a whole. The human rights of girls are gaining incremental visibility in national legislation, but weak enforcement and poor accountability mechanisms remain major obstacles to the much-needed improvement of public policies and change of attitudes and behavior condoning violence. Violence does not take place in

a vacuum. It is often a continuum fueled by discrimination, social exclusion, deep-rooted prejudices, and abusive power relations. To end violence against women and girls, it is crucial to address structural and social violence and make this a cause of all and for all.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the CRC set in motion a paradigm shift in the social and legal status of women and children. The Post-2015 Development Agenda represents a golden opportunity for world leaders and the peoples of the United Nations to deliver on the promises they made. Capitalizing on those commitments, equity and social progress can become a reality for all members of the human family.

# The Importance of Women in Decision-Making Roles for Development

Susan Markham

*Senior Gender Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, U.S. Agency for International Development (United States)*

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USAID understands that the equal participation of women in the political, economic, and social systems of a society is essential to our mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies. In fact, one of the three goals of the “USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment” is to increase the influence of women and girls in decision-making processes within households, communities, and societies. The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), prepared jointly by the U.S. Department of State and USAID, placed women at the center of U.S. diplomacy—not simply as beneficiaries, but also as agents of peace, reconciliation, development, growth, and stability.

A growing body of research demonstrates that societies with greater gender equality experience faster economic growth and benefit from greater agricultural productivity and improved food security. Empowering women to participate in and lead public and private institutions makes these institutions more representative and effective. Additionally, states with a higher percentage of women in parliament are less likely to use violence to resolve a dispute.

At USAID, women are being included in decision-making processes and implementation of programs, ranging from responding to crises to participating in ongoing initiatives. Women account for over half of all of the reported Ebola deaths in West Africa. As caregivers for sick family members and friends as well as the ones in charge of burial rites, women's traditional gender roles have put them in contact with the victims. However, women are also a key component of the global response as we work to control the spread of the disease and re-create economic and political stability within these communities. In response to the recent humanitarian crisis in Iraq, women are on the frontlines providing not only food and shelter to displaced families, but also securing the medical and psycho-social services needed for the victims of sexual violence in the conflict and working at the community level to negotiate small ceasefires.

This summer, I met a woman in Zambia who had taken part in a program to increase the productivity of her crops. Working with USAID and a local civil society partner, her yield had increased over 200 percent. She could not wait to speak publicly about her success. While the agricultural goals of the program had clearly been met, her success had changed the way she thought of herself and the role she could play in leading her community. This fundamental switch in thinking is the key to long-term cultural change and a change in the perceived importance of women in decision-making roles.

# Women and Girls with Disabilities – From the Global Perspective

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**W**omen and girls with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged groups globally. They deserve special attention at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, because women with disabilities face additional barriers to achieving gender equality.

More than one billion persons worldwide experience some form of disability. Within this group, women experience a higher prevalence of disability<sup>3</sup> and disproportionately high rates of poverty. At the same time, women living in poverty are at an increased risk of becoming disabled due to such factors as inadequate access to healthcare, including maternal healthcare, poor living conditions, malnutrition, and health-endangering employment.

In all regions of the world, persons with disabilities face marginalization and significant barriers to the full realization of their rights and to their inclusion in society and development. Women with disabilities experience multiple discriminations, based both on their gender and their disability, and therefore often must confront additional disadvantages compared to men with disabilities. Some may face further discrimination based on other aspects of their identities, such as minority or indigenous status.

Women with disabilities often lack access to services essential to the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. For example, in terms of healthcare, women with disabilities must contend with inaccessible clinics and procedures, lack of accessible information, and lack of awareness and appropriate training among healthcare providers.

Women with disabilities have limited access to education and consequently demonstrate lower educational attainment compared to the general population. While existing data are

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<sup>3</sup> According to the World Health Organization's 2011 World Report on Disability, in both developing and more developed countries, male disability prevalence rate is 12 per cent and female disability prevalence rate is 19.2 per cent. *World Report on Disability*, p. 28

limited, a commonly cited estimate is that the global literacy rate is as low as three percent for all adults with disabilities, and one percent for women with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Women with disabilities experience higher rates of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment, and exploitation than women without disabilities.<sup>5</sup> Violence may be experienced in the home and in other settings, including institutions, and may be perpetrated by caregivers, family members, or strangers, among others.

Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women with disabilities is necessary not only for the realization of their rights, but also for building an inclusive Post-2015 Development Agenda. Special measures are urgently needed at all levels to integrate women with disabilities into the mainstream of development.

Due attention must also be paid to the intersectionality between disability issues and women's issues more generally. To advance the rights of women with disabilities in society and development, it is essential that their perspectives are included throughout all work for women's empowerment, and that all work on disability incorporates a gender perspective. This should take place in all aspects of activities for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

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<sup>4</sup> Helander E, Prejudice and dignity: an introduction to community based rehabilitation, 2nd Edition. New York: UNDP, 1998

<sup>5</sup> In his 2006 *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women*, the Secretary-General observed that surveys conducted in Europe, North America and Australia have shown that over half of women with disabilities have experienced physical abuse, compared to one third of non-disabled women. A/61/122/Add.1, para. 152, Citing to Human Rights Watch, "Women and girls with disabilities", available at: <http://hrw.org/women/disabled.html>.

# A Light at the End of the Dark Tunnel

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**W**e would be amiss to say that the status of women in Arab countries is unchanged since 1995. Serious efforts have been made to address each of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the cup as half full, women's educational attainments improved particularly in the gross enrollment of women at the tertiary educational level. Illiteracy rates of women remain extremely high, however, in several countries like Morocco, Yemen, Egypt, and recently Iraq, especially among older women. Women's share in the labor force increased at the regional level, although there are wide disparities across the 22 countries of the League of Arab States. Microcredit succeeded in alleviating poverty among women to a limited extent, but was proven to be disappointingly unsustainable. National mechanisms for women were established in all 22 countries of the League of Arab States in the form of ministries, supreme councils, commissions, or committees. These mechanisms are instrumental in monitoring the implementation of international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Unfortunately, these mechanisms are typically allocated limited financial and human resources to fully and effectively discharge their functions. In a few countries, reservations to CEDAW were withdrawn, parity in electoral laws was introduced, and constitutional or electoral gender quotas were adopted. Moreover, gender-sensitive laws and legislation including nationality, personal, and family laws were enacted in some countries to eliminate or reduce discrimination against women.

Looking at the cup as half empty, achievements in education and economic participation were not matched by advances in women's political representation and leadership. Gender inequalities are lingering in public office; a little over one-tenth of parliamentary seats and less than five percent of positions in national and local governments are occupied by women, with wide disparities across countries. Women's membership in political parties is limited and women's share of decision-making and leadership posts remains

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<sup>6</sup> These include health, education, economic and political participation, poverty, violence against women, wars and armed conflict, decision making and leadership, media, the girl-child, national machineries for women, and women's rights, laws and legislation.

minimal. This phenomenon is a function of the religiosity of parties. Religious extremism is gaining ground, and the greater the religiosity of parties, the smaller the share of women at top-level posts. Furthermore, patriarchy and political culture play a dominant role in women's political careers. Men dominate the political realm in all public institutions and particularly at decision-making levels. Women's relative gains in the public sector are much lower than those in the private sector as decision makers, managers, and chief executive officers. However, this is not *sui generis* to the Arab region. This is a global phenomenon, which should be addressed at the international level.

Additionally, political instability, wars, and civil conflict have a differential impact on women. The Arab uprisings since 2011 have taken their toll on women. Not only was there a rollback in women's hard-acquired rights with threats to lose more, but one is also awed by the rise in religious extremism and the atrocities being committed against women in the name of Islam. Violence against women in all its forms is rampant. The Beijing Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, UNSCR 1325, CEDAW, and other international conventions which constitute the framework for gender equality and gender mainstreaming do not seem to protect women from the barbarism and cruelty of ISIS. The international community, regional organizations, international organizations, and civil society are all watching as women carry the brunt of stoning, slavery, trafficking, and forced early marriages as trophies to warriors. We are back to pre-medieval ages!

On the occasion of Beijing+20, maybe what we need is a new world conference on women focusing on religious extremism as inimical to women's advancement and political empowerment. Once the gender gap in public service diminishes and women start to share equally in decision making, political leadership, and governance, women-friendly legislation will be enacted and women will be protected from religious extremism.

# Beijing+20 and its Impact on Women's Political Participation

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**D**espite some conservative backlash, the historic outcome of the 1995 UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing—the Beijing Platform for Action—has left an important positive impact on women's status around the world, including women's political participation and representation. The growing influence of global feminism and the strength of grassroots women's rights movements in different parts of the world have been in large part facilitated by the conventions produced through the UN, especially its gender-specific agencies. Women have co-opted the UN as their “unlikely godmother”<sup>7</sup> and benefitted from the power of the UN blessing in their bargaining with male-dominated and patriarchal political systems. Women have utilized the UN-ratified universal conventions such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), the Beijing Platform for Action, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 as legitimate and effective tools or blueprints to secure state commitments at national and international levels to redress gender imbalances in the political arena and others domains of social life.

Today, 20 years after the Beijing Platform for Action, most member states of the UN have recognized (at least on paper) gender parity in formal politics as a necessary requirement for democratic practice and social justice. For example, more than 100 nations have adopted either voluntary (party-level) gender quotas in electoral politics or a state-mandated quota system. Two-thirds of these quota systems were created in the last 20 years since the articulation of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. This progress toward gender balance in formal political structures, however, has varied widely and remains very slow and riddled with continuous institutional and political barriers and cultural and ideological challenges. As of July 2014, the average representation of women in legislatures around the world is about 22 percent—a slow increase from 11.3 percent in 1995. The highest level of progress in parliamentary representation is seen in Nordic countries (42 percent) and the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa (16 percent). Many parties pay lip service

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<sup>7</sup> Snyder, Margaret. Unlikely Godmother: the UN and the Global Women's Movement. *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Tripp, 2006.

to the idea of gender parity in governance. As of January 2014, 9 women serve as head of state and 15 serve as head of government. Only 17 percent of government ministers are women, who usually hold the ministry of education, health, and family welfare. Historically, family dynasty or hereditary principle has been the primary route to political power for women (84.4 percent); only 4.3 percent of them were elected to their political office.<sup>8</sup>

As stated in a slogan by the Network of Political Women in Argentina, “with few women in politics, it is the women who change. With many women in politics, politics change.” The critical mass for women’s representation is considered 30 percent. However, despite a widely held and rather essentialist assumption, “more women in politics does not necessarily correlate with lower levels of corruption. Rather, democratic and transparent politics is correlated with low levels of corruption and the two create an enabling environment for more women to participate.”<sup>9</sup>

Innovative strategies that can secure women’s full citizenship and equal access to political power and decision making at local, national, and international levels should include informal politics (informal channels of power, women’s grassroots activism, NGOs, Internet campaigns) and formal politics at state levels (legislative, executive, and judicial). We have learned from feminists that the personal is political. Globalization and international relations have taught us that the personal is global or international. Therefore, the “triple roles of women in productive, reproductive, and community management spheres must inform the efforts for creating a supportive environment for women’s political participation” as stated by Farzana Bari in 2005. Provision of childcare and care work and access to social capital as well as financial support, the Internet, and international agencies such as the UN and other transitional networks are vital to enabling women to participate in the political development processes.

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<sup>8</sup> Hawkesworth, Mary. *Political Worlds of Women: Activism, Advocacy, and Governance in the Twenty-First Century*, Westview Press, 2012

<sup>9</sup> UN Development Fund for Women, 2008, *Progress of the World’s Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women?*, New York.

# Underrepresentation of Women in the Decision-Making Process in Bangladesh

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**D**espite the barriers of *purdah* (veiling) and patriarchy, women have become more politically visible in the last two decades. A quota has ensured women's presence in the local government and National Parliament (Jatiyo Sangshad, Bangladesh's supreme legislative body) in Bangladesh. The presence of women in the National Parliament does not, however, truly reflect the level of political consciousness of women in Bangladesh. The condition of women's participation in local level politics is sometimes worse than it is in national politics.

## **Women in Parliament:**

In the 10<sup>th</sup> Parliament there are 50 standing committees with a total number of 509 parliamentarians, of whom 428 are male and 81 are female. Sixty-nine women parliamentarians were elected in the 2014 general elections. Fifty of these women were elected on the reserved seats and 19 were elected directly. Out of 540 candidates, only 27 were women from different political parties; 19 of whom won seats in Parliament. Former State Minister of Women and Children Affairs Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury became the first woman Speaker of Jatiyo Sangshad in Bangladesh's history.

## **Women in Political Parties:**

As reported in the national daily newspaper, *The Daily Star*, in March 2014:

Although women hold three of the most powerful positions in the country's parliament, their representation in the decision-making bodies in political parties is nearly non-existent. The two main political parties, headed by women, have very few female members in their advisory committees and national or executive committees.

The ruling Awami League has nine women on its 72-member Central Executive Committee and two on its 32-member Advisory Committee. There are no women on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Advisory Committee, while its 116-member National Executive Committee has only six women. The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami

has no female members in its top two bodies: Majlish-e-Shura and Majlish-e-Amla. This abysmal situation was revealed when the Representation of the People Order (RPO) asked political parties to increase women's representation in their decision-making bodies to 30 percent by 2020, which is only six years away.<sup>10</sup>

### **Women in Local Government:**

In 1976, the Bangladesh government adopted the Local Government Ordinance and introduced a three-tier local government system. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act 1997 allows for direct election of one chairperson and 12 members to the Union Parishad. Three seats are reserved for women members. In elections held on January 22, 2009 under the Representation of the People Order 2008, 480 women out of a total number of 1,936 candidates were elected to the reserved post of vice chairpersons in 480 Upazilas (sub-districts of Bangladesh).

### **Concluding remarks:**

Because women comprise about 50 percent of Bangladesh's population, the role of women and their participation in the process of socio-political and economic development is imperative for the economic development of the country as a whole. It is important to reaffirm the pledges made by the government to increase women's representation and take action in promoting women's effective participation in decision making and managerial positions by ensuring their presence, scope of action, and capacity.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.thedailystar.net/print\\_post/womens-share-in-party-leadership-abysmal-report-16439](http://www.thedailystar.net/print_post/womens-share-in-party-leadership-abysmal-report-16439)

# Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

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**T**he watershed cusp of Beijing+20, the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), and the deliberations around the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals present a historic opportunity. It is an invitation to re-envision a global compact that engenders and brings into the foreground the link between sustainable development, security, peace, environment, democracy, and gender justice.

Since the turn of the century, women all over the world—particularly in South Asia—have entered the arena of peacebuilding through the corridors of human security in larger numbers than ever before. They have interrogated notions of security that have tended to be jingoistic, militaristic, and state-centric. They have questioned the practices of war making and the mindsets that legitimize militarism and the stockpiling of weapons. They have systematically critiqued state-building and development paradigms that have been exclusionary: pervasive violence against women; women's lack of equal representation in elected bodies and legislatures; the complicities of the patriarchies of family, community, and state that are often aligned against them; the lack of access to health and nutrition and sexual and reproductive rights; and, above all, women's exclusion from the negotiating tables where formal peace is often “brokered.”

Many women have highlighted the imperative to “craft” an inclusive and just peace to address the structural causes of conflict that impact women and men in different ways. They have spoken out about how systemic violence impacts their access to livelihoods and their economic and political rights. They have mobilized around these issues transcending borders and boundaries to establish regional and global networks.

The fillip for much of this was the spirit of UNSCR 1325 and related UN Security Council resolutions that emphasized moving away from a discourse of victimhood toward a discourse of women's agency in conflict, post-conflict situations, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding initiatives. Women in many countries have demonstrated that their increased visibility in public service has encouraged new entrants to this field who then push the

envelope on gender justice, accountability, and democratic transparency.

In countries like India, where women hold up “half the sky,” women’s growing entry into the bureaucracy, medicine, engineering, law, media, industry, banking, commerce, diplomacy, education, and politics, for instance, has empowered civil society initiatives of both men and women to engage even more productively in the arena of peacebuilding. From the all-women peacekeeping force in Liberia to the crucial band of women scientists who facilitated the recently successful Mars Mission, there are several areas of public service where women have shattered glass ceilings and redefined notions of success in workplaces to underscore a work ethic of care with efficiency. The dynamics of boardroom priorities are also changing from profits to people.

Yet a lot more needs to be done in the areas of peace and security and political representation where women’s continued marginalization decreases the chances that peace accords will survive. It is here that many more silences need to be broken and a new discourse needs to be scripted.

First, even as gender equality is being recognized as integral and inalienable to democratic good governance, strengthening women’s participation in conflict resolution must be increased. This increase should be in accordance with the increased levels of intrastate political and ethnic conflicts around the globe.

Second, all aspects contributing to the vulnerability of women in society such as illiteracy, violence, lack of access to social security and healthcare, etc. need to be included squarely within the ambit of redefining the security discourse. “National” security must be demystified, freed from deterrence vocabularies, and addressed in a democratic dialogue that considers the heat and dust of ordinary citizens’ quotidian insecurities and anxieties.

Third, governments must be urged to bring gender considerations into all conflict transformation processes within and between states. This includes increasing the numeric and substantive representation of women at all stages of conflict transformation processes, including multi-track diplomacy initiatives. A continuum of communication needs to be built from the village council to the negotiation table. The contribution of women should not be confined to the so-called “soft issues” of development, but all inclusive. This could include participation of women troops in national and international peacekeeping operations.

Fourth, leadership and capacity building programs and advocacy training in peacebuilding, negotiations, etc. are crucial. The pool of trained women and gender experts needs to be enhanced, since peacebuilding requires special skills that must be deployed at several levels of conflict transformation.

Fifth, both men and women must speak on behalf of those women who may not be

present at the peace table and whose voices must be adequately represented and relayed. Continuous dialogue between those at the negotiation tables and women at the grassroots needs to be facilitated.

Sixth, adequate child and family care arrangements for women peace builders and negotiators must be considered in all funding related to peacebuilding processes.

Seventh, environmental issues and the contributions and concerns of women on ecological sustainability should be given due importance since this is a crucial sector of ongoing and potential conflict within and between societies.

Eighth, civil society efforts that build solidarities among women's networks across borders and boundaries can often be a stronger force in engendering peace and security processes than formal government interventions. These efforts need support.

Ninth, experience and research show that peace processes that do not consider gender issues are often in danger of failing. Peace and security discussions need to be reconfigured as an intertwined matrix of issues that also involve education, public health, the feminization of poverty, wage differentials, unpaid labor, the ignored role of domestic and agricultural work, and the pervasive violence against women, among others, in order to emphasize the importance of human security.

Tenth, the exchange of good practices and ideas on how organizations advance women's rights and gender justice in both conflict resolution and the transitional process is essential. This exchange will go a long way to realize shared goals that are both context-sensitive and global in their impact. This is part of linking the global and local imperatives to create an inclusive set of parameters for action. Civil society has rich expertise to offer here.

Finally, enhancing the effectiveness of women in peace processes is linked to enhancing the qualitative and numeric representation of women in all institutions of democracy, including legislature and public bodies. Gender representation is a cross-cutting issue and will contribute greatly in changing patriarchal mindsets about the de-weaponization of society, the elimination of small arms in the hands of local militia and terrorist groups, zero impunity for the excesses of armed forces, and other manifestations of various fundamentalisms that threaten peace.

Peacebuilding—in its ultimate form—is about transforming relationships by building trust among and between peoples. It is about democratic dialogue and building a stake in the future of humanity. Educating women for public leadership is about making despair unconvincing and hope practical. The call for such an engagement is optimally present in the fortuitous convergences of 2015. It is necessary for women to work in partnership with men to collaboratively usher in a world waiting to be born.

# Beijing+20: The World Needs More Women Leaders

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**W**omen worldwide have made significant achievements on a whole array of women's issues in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the expansion of their political rights. Yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the struggle for equal participation is still a demand for many women around the globe.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains an inspiration and a driving force for women's movements worldwide. The 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing gave impetus to women's issues and equality globally and placed women's political participation at the top of the global agenda.

Yet women around the world still struggle to achieve equal footing with men in politics. Recent statistics show that women are still politically underrepresented worldwide despite international pressure and national efforts to increase women's political representation. It is disappointing to repeatedly see Arab countries at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Report rankings. This wide gender gap is believed to be one of the main obstacles and challenges to development in the Arab world.

Even when women are given a chance to be decision makers, they are often appointed to "soft" positions and ministries that deal with family affairs, women's issues, children, social work, etc. These positions are considered a continuation and reflection of traditional gender roles. Women's modest political participation in some Arab states is described as "symbolic," and women's presence in political life is "motionless."

With the exception of Algeria, the quota system is still stumbling in some Arab countries and absent in others. Arab women's representation in the three elected branches is still classified as the lowest in the world. Admittedly, there are major challenges for the advancement of Arab women, including their political participation, that need to be seriously addressed. For example, illiteracy and limited education pose a huge challenge to women acquiring necessary skills and comprehending ongoing policies and politics.

In Yemen, women have been fighting for a 30 percent quota in the three elected branches

for 20 years, but in vain, with only one woman having secured a seat in parliament. This “orphan chair” does not reflect Yemeni women who constitute more than 51 percent of the population. The 30 percent quota was one of the main outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference that is meant to be included in the new constitution. In 2015, the drafted constitution will be put to a referendum and hopefully the results will be in women’s favor.

Women’s low political representation in Yemen is associated with the prevailing patriarchal system, religious misconceptions, and illiteracy that pose persistent barriers to women’s entry into elected office. These interwoven factors represent a vicious cycle that has subjected women to exclusion from the public sphere.

Despite modest progress in some Arab countries in recent years, the current turmoil and instability in the region is feared to send women’s achievements and status back to square one. Therefore, imposing UN Security Council Resolution 1325—calling for women’s leadership in conflict resolution and peacekeeping—is needed more than ever in the region.

Twenty years after Beijing, it is essential to revisit and evaluate what has been done and what should be done regarding women’s political participation. While reviewing the Millennium Development Goals and Beijing Declaration, we must take into account the new developments and current context of each region and introduce innovative approaches and initiatives that will contribute to enhancing women’s status in all aspects.

We must also consider that it is not merely a matter of increasing the number of women in parliaments and having more women in decision-making positions, but must also move beyond numbers and assess the tangible effects of including women in the formulation of policies and laws that meet their needs and serve their well-being and society at large. Women’s rights should be addressed as one package.

# Women 20 Years After the Beijing Declaration: Viewpoints from Algeria

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**T**he Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country. During the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962), Algerian women took an equal role alongside their male counterparts and achieved a new sense of their own identity. In the aftermath of the war, Algerian women gained the right to vote and run for political office in 1962, and that very same year a woman was appointed to parliament for the first time.

Women maintained their newfound emancipation during the 1970s and early 1980s. Unlike other countries in the region, equality for women is enshrined in Algerian laws and in the Constitution; however, very few women reach the level of political decision making. There were no women in the first nine governments that followed the country's independence; only in 1984 did Algeria appoint its first female minister. It would be almost 20 years before another woman would hold a leadership position: under the 26<sup>th</sup> government, elected in June 2002, the second woman minister and four women deputy ministers were appointed.

Legal and constitutional equality and the position of women in society were shaken in 1984 when the legislature introduced *shari'a* law within state laws as a pillar for "Family Law." This action considerably undermined the legal rights of women.

In 1996, Algeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with reservations to several articles: 2 (policy measures), 15 (freedom to choose residence and domicile), 16 (equality in marriage and family life), and 29 (related to the administration of the convention, arbitration in the event of a dispute). Reservations to article 9 were withdrawn in 2005, when Algeria amended the nationality code, allowing women married to non-Algerian men to pass on their Algerian citizenship to their children.

After the Arab Spring, in the midst of violent fighting and the rise of extremism in the region, Algeria chose to increase women's political representation in the lower and upper

houses of parliament. Algeria amended its electoral law in 2012, imposing a minimum quota of 30 percent women on all electoral lists, to elect 145 women members of parliament (MPs) out of a total of 462 seats. Furthermore, in 2014, Algeria appointed seven women ministers. A regional branch of UN Women praised Algeria's government, calling the move "historical" and a "role model" for neighboring Arab countries.

Contemporary Algerian women are well-educated, present in national security, the Chancery, higher education, administration, and the legal field, where about 37 percent of prosecutors and judges are women. Algerian women have access to bank loans and other forms of financial credit. It should also be noted that Algeria recorded the first female president of a political party to seek presidential office in the Arab world.

Today, despite the considerable advances seen in the Algerian political sphere, women's economic participation remains very low, with only 17.7 percent of women in the workforce in 2011. Algeria needs a better and more sustainable business climate that supports entrepreneurship and a financial sector that gives access to financial support. The autonomy and empowerment of women are key; Algeria, like any other country in the region, cannot simply ignore half of its population.

Furthermore, Algeria, like the rest of the region, cannot ignore the growing threat of extremism, which undermines women and the image of women as mothers and promotes massive killing, rape, and abuse of women—all of which are reminiscent of daily life during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s.

Today a major pillar merits review and development: education. Education in gender equality, civil rights, and citizenship must be taught to all children to ensure that they grow and develop in a society where the principles of equality and meritocracy, regardless of gender, are valued. There needs to be a focus on promoting education, raising community awareness, enhancing legal protection, and allocating resources. Countries must demonstrate their belief in women in the private sector by introducing progressive laws that protect working women and by abolishing any form of discrimination toward women—starting with any "family code" imposed upon women that undermines their legal rights.

The decision is ours; we can either decide to learn from our past experiences or be doomed to endure them again.

# Gender Diversity on Boards: The Case of Kenya

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**I**n the recent past, the question of diversity and pluralism has been the focus of boardroom development. The argument comes from resource theories indicating that diversity among board members contributes to superior company performance through resource provision, networks, and advisory roles. This brings forth discussions on the question of increasing the number of women or minority directors on boards and what value they bring. For many years, women were considered to be merely important tokens in the boardroom. It is the thesis of this paper, however, that women add great value to boards despite the numerous barriers they face. Women must be given the opportunity to serve on boards because of the diversity they bring.

Over the past several decades in Kenya, women's leadership in professional fields has been embraced and resisted, accepted and denied both by institutions and individuals. The road to leadership in boardrooms and in public office has been bumpy. However, the Kenyan Constitution of 2010 seeks to address this by providing for the principles of gender equality and inclusion, mandating that in both appointed and elected positions, there should not be more than two-thirds representation of either gender. In November 2012, the Supreme Court of Kenya ruled that the implementation of the equality rule in elected positions would occur progressively, although the framework should be in place by August 2015. I am privileged to be chairing the multi-sectoral working group looking at this framework. This task is challenging because of the barriers that keep women from participating in political campaigns.

Kenya has made progress in increasing the number of women in political positions through affirmative action at the local and national levels. In the National Assembly, for example, women hold 19 percent of the seats. In the Senate, women's representation stands at 26.5 percent, although all are nominated from political parties as part of affirmative action. For the first time in the history of Kenya we have a female deputy speaker of the National Assembly and a female chief whip in the Senate, to mention a few. There is also a slow but deliberate increase of women directors on boards. By the end of 2012, of the companies

listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange, women occupied only 54 out of 449 seats on boards with only one female chairperson. Since that time the numbers have risen slightly, with five women currently chairing boards of private companies.

Board diversity makes good business sense but must be accompanied by knowledge, skills, and competency in order to realize board effectiveness. Laws on gender representation, affirmative action, and quotas are essential to increasing women's representation at decision-making levels, but diversity may not in itself be a characteristic of the boardroom culture.

The revolution in corporate governance in Kenya will certainly give a boost to the debate on women's leadership overall, including in the public sector, and will help fulfill the goals of the Beijing Declaration, which holds that achieving the goal of equal participation of men and women in decision making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society to promote democracy.

# Beijing+20 and the Road Ahead

Hanan Saab

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**I**n the 20 years since the Beijing Declaration of 1995, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has gone through a critical period in its modern history. While gains have been achieved at the level of women's education across all the countries of the MENA region, only 24 percent of women are participating in the workforce. Efforts should be dedicated to encourage more women to engage in the workforce in order to achieve financial independence. This is the key to achieving autonomy, empowerment, and self-fulfillment.

A study conducted in France found that companies with more women on their boards suffered less in the financial crisis than those with fewer women on their boards.<sup>11</sup> Such findings should be highlighted, disseminated, and communicated to the public, government, and policymakers.

Women need to support each other and collaborate more as stakeholders. Active, properly managed, and organized businesswomen associations are well-equipped to carry out the mission of helping to close the gender gap. Such associations should liaise and closely collaborate with research centers undertaking studies on gender in order to obtain direction. Additionally, think tanks should be engaged to set action plans and target well-identified, strategic objectives.

Conferences organized by such associations, with well-balanced speaker panels, would provide platforms for raising awareness and sharing relevant research findings and social change tactics. Such initiatives would create a multiplier effect that could pressure government and policymakers to accommodate recommendations and effect change.

Men should be targeted to participate in such conferences. They could generate awareness and serve as partners in supporting initiatives for closing the gender gap and creating more balance in decision-making platforms. Men who engage in such initiatives should be identified, showcased, and awarded publicly as role models seeking healthier and more

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<sup>11</sup> Credit-Suisse Research Institute. "Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance." August 2012. [https://www.credit-suisse.com/newsletter/doc/gender\\_diversity.pdf](https://www.credit-suisse.com/newsletter/doc/gender_diversity.pdf)

prosperous economies. Together, men and women can create a critical mass to spearhead campaigns to achieve the needed reforms that propel our economies forward.

Such campaigns should target the public sector as well as private institutions such as banks, holding companies, and financial companies, where glass ceilings are prevalent.

Last but not least, with mushrooming conflicts around the world, women, more than at any other time, cannot afford to accept marginalization. By bringing lives into the world, they are the most important stakeholders that should be involved in conflict resolution for the welfare of humanity.

# The BPA and CEDAW Convention as Tools to Achieve Gender Equality and to Close the Gender Gap in Decision Making

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**T**he Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 (BPA) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 (CEDAW) are grounded on the principle of equality between women and men. The BPA as a policy document called for the protection of women's rights as human rights. CEDAW is a human rights instrument for the protection of women's rights as human rights and the empowerment of women in all areas of life, including decision-making processes and political participation. The BPA and CEDAW sought commitments from states to ensure through law and other appropriate means the practical realization of both international frameworks. Today, the principle of substantive equality between women and men is emerging as a principle of customary international law.

The BPA relied on and mirrored the fundamental provisions of CEDAW and called for its universal ratification, withdrawal of reservations, and its full implementation. It also called for the elaboration of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. This was achieved in 2000 when it was adopted and established procedures for individual complaints and inquiries about grave or systematic violations of the rights set forth in CEDAW. Furthermore, the BPA strongly linked both instruments by entrusting the CEDAW Committee to monitor the implementation of CEDAW and the BPA.

The descriptive level of political participation of women is the most visible and measurable indicator of the status of women in a given society. The BPA calls for "positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders," while CEDAW calls for the application of temporary special measures aimed to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality. Obstacles for equal representation of women in decision making have their root causes in persistent direct and indirect discrimination against women in all areas of life, including gender

stereotypes and harmful practices, violence against women, educational gaps, wage gaps, and restrictions on reproductive rights. These different forms of discrimination keep women out of the decision-making process in times of peace, during conflict, and in post-conflict environments. The BPA and CEDAW are transformative tools for change, but the tragedy of today is that they are not sufficiently recognized as accepted commitments and roads to achieve gender equality marked by the full participation of women in decision making. Let us change this and use them fully!

# Arab Women and the Agenda for Change

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**W**hen I was appointed by the United Nations to be Regional Coordinator of the Arab region for the NGO Forum held in Beijing in 1995, I was not aware that I would take part in creating an important milestone in the struggle of women in modern history: the shaping of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. I was also not aware that I would be the one who would set the regional action plan for NGOs in the Arab region, which would later become a component of the international approach.

My joy today is indescribable as I witness the elapse of 20 years since the conference was held. Since 1995, I have published numerous studies and books that have shed light on the march of Arab women after Beijing. What would I say now 20 years after the conference? What could I say about the achievements of empowering women to reach decision-making positions and the unrealized pledges since the launch of the declaration in 1995? There are still challenges and difficulties at different levels, and we must review and appraise what has been implemented in the 20 years since the conference convened.

Although some Arab countries have implemented parliamentary quotas for women as a kind of affirmative action, there are many women's groups that do not support such quotas. They believe that women can obtain seats in parliament without quotas, with some believing that women could win 50 percent of parliamentary seats in any Arab country if they wanted to. However, several years after quotas were applied in countries where women initially endorsed it, the challenge of women's ability to get out of the quota dilemma to compete with men for parliamentary seats without the quota remains.

The future road map will remain useless and futile unless it is accompanied with a qualitative shift in Arab legislative, economic, social, political, and cultural life and in Arab education systems. The most prominent obstacles facing women's march toward social justice are men's monopoly on the decision-making process within the family and in various societal institutions, the dominance of the traditional division of roles based on the exclusion of

women from the public sphere, the absence of democratic traditions in the community that results in unilateral rather than collective decision making, and the limited awareness among women of the importance of their political role in nominations or elections.

The exclusion of women from political decision making is not a marginal issue. It is a decision of deliberate exclusion from drafting laws and constitutional protections. The underlying cause of this exclusion is the dominance of hardliners on the position of Arab women in society. This discourse is gaining popularity in many Arab countries and it pushes Arab women away from the rights they have already gained.

We are on the threshold of Beijing+20, 15 years after UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and on the eve of the endorsement of the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals. It is impossible to achieve the goals of equality, development, and peace unless full and equal participation of women in the decision-making process in political and public life is achieved, in order to definitively reflect the passage of Beijing+20 and what needs to be done in order to bridge the gap between men and women in decision making.

# Participation of Women in the Public and Political Life

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## Introduction

The year 2014 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration of 1995. The year 2012 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) Committee and 33 years after the CEDAW Convention. Now we are looking forward toward the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals and beyond. This is the time to reflect on women's advancement and true gains for women's rights. We must also reflect on the main challenges for women's advancement in the past and those now lying ahead while focusing on the role of women in governance and the underlying causes of the underrepresentation of women in the public sphere.

The last two decades have witnessed an increase in women's representation in politics. Quotas have been introduced in countries throughout the world and have become an important mechanism to improve women's access to political offices. Before 1985, there were only four countries that had introduced quotas for women. Today there are more than 100 countries that have adopted some kind of quota.

Despite increased adoption of quotas, the rise in women's representation has remained limited. The global average of women's participation in politics at present is only 19.5 percent and needs to be balanced toward more equal representation. Women constitute 51 percent of the world's population, yet they are underrepresented in the political arenas that make key decisions affecting their lives.

## CEDAW Convention, Application of Quotas, and Temporary Special Measures

CEDAW prescribes the application of quotas through temporary special measures to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance at all levels and women's leadership in all decision-making processes. Articles 7 and 8 of CEDAW explicitly cover the rights of women regarding non-discrimination in a country's public and political spheres; the right to equality with men in regard to the right to vote; the right to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and its implementation; the right to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government; the right to participate in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations concerned with the public and political life of the

country; and the right to represent the national government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

General Recommendations numbers 5, 8, 23, and 25 of CEDAW are important for the discussion on the quota systems that increase the participation of women in public and political life. General Recommendation 23 of 1997 explicitly deals with Articles 7 and 8 of CEDAW. General Recommendation 23 echoes relevant paragraphs of the Beijing Platform for Action and points to the historical and structural causes of discrimination against women in public and political life. The application of quota systems is greatly emphasized in General Recommendation 25 of 2004 concerning Article 4 (1) regarding the application of temporary special measures. A discussion on the application of quota systems to achieve and maintain gender balance in public and political life must be positioned in a human rights framework.

CEDAW aims to achieve uniform development for women all over the world using global normative standards that have been enshrined in its 16 substantive articles, its 29 General Recommendations, and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. CEDAW's profound impact on the legal and socio-political development of States Parties is visible in the strengthening of institutional provisions for the protection of women's rights and efforts to bring existing legislation in to conformity with Convention principles, and in the improvement in the capacity of national institutions and gender budgeting to guarantee equality between men and women.

The statistical breakdown of women in parliament by region in 2014, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, is as follows: Nordic countries: 41.6 percent, Americas: 25.7 percent, Europe including Nordic countries: 24.9 percent, Europe excluding Nordic countries: 23.6 percent, Asia: 18.3 percent, Sub-Saharan Africa: 22.2 percent, Pacific: 15.3 percent, and Arab states: 15.9 percent.

At the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEDAW in 2012, Michelle Bachelet, the President of Chile and former executive director of UN Women, stated that democracy is “not only about the right to vote but also about the right to be elected.” She also pointed out that male-dominated parliaments and governments could not have a level of sensitivity to women's concerns and rights equal to that of fully representative governing bodies.

### **Women's Leadership in Different Countries**

There have been some truly ground-breaking results of parliamentary elections in countries such as Rwanda, Sweden, South Africa, Nicaragua, Timor-Leste, Liberia, and Nepal. Quotas are very effective in those countries. For example, Nepal has the highest level of women's participation in parliament in the Asia-Pacific region with women holding 33 percent of parliamentary seats.

Women also hold leadership positions in countries throughout the world in key areas outside of parliament. Women's leadership positions in Uganda, including vice president and senior posts in the key ministries of finance and planning, health, and education, have had a positive impact on social attitudes regarding women's political participation in Uganda. Women are now more visible in leadership posts in Uganda, having risen from under 10 percent in 2001 to about 35 percent in 2010.

Bangladesh is also a unique example because women have served both as prime minister and as the opposition leader for more than a decade. Both positions are elected by popular vote. President Dilma Rousseff is the first female president in the history of Brazil. Australia, Germany, Finland, Thailand, Liberia, and some other countries also have female heads of government and heads of state. In the recent past, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and Israel have had women in top government positions.

Female leadership has altered the traditional notions of male-dominated politics and transformed social norms related to who should be in leadership positions. A 2007 study in India found that the increased presence and visibility of female politicians in local government raised the academic performance and career aspirations of young women. It also changed social attitudes toward women. In Bangladesh, the reservation of seats for women at the local government levels has increased the number of women in politics at the grassroots level.

## Challenges

Despite some progress in women's representation in the public and political arenas and increased adoption of quotas, women are still underrepresented in the public and political spheres. This underrepresentation is due to high levels of gender discrimination and little protection to women's political, social, and economic rights in society. In most cases, glass ceilings prevent educated and eligible women from rising further in politics. Top positions in government and heads of institutions or corporations are mostly occupied by men, though gender quotas are accepted as a principle of governance. Where legislated quotas are being introduced, many parliamentarians cannot agree on placement rules for female candidates and women may still end up on the bottom of election lists. In business, the level of participation of women as members of boards of directors is considerably lower than their representation in the overall workforce.

In some countries, flexing muscle is important in politics, where women's control is very weak. Political violence and sexual harassment are important barriers that prevent women from exercising their rights to run for office or to vote. In male-dominated societies, women often have no control over money and finances because of the lack of inheritance and property rights. This is an important obstacle for women in politics because money plays a significant role in the election process.

The implementation of quotas remains complex, requiring a number of parallel processes and measures. In order to be effective, they require concerted efforts of political parties, parliaments, electoral management bodies, public administration offices, and civil society members. Quotas are also controversial; opponents argue that quotas are discriminatory or undemocratic. We need to see more awareness of the positive effects of quotas through active participation of government institutions, election commissions, and the broader involvement of the general public.

## **Conclusion**

Many gender advocates are focused on promoting gender-responsive governance and greater female involvement in the electoral process by encouraging women to stand for election, training and mentoring female electoral candidates, and educating voters about the importance of women's participation in public life. They have particularly advocated for the use of temporary special measures such as quotas to guarantee female representation in parliament and also for requiring political parties to nominate a certain number of women as candidates. In countries with legislated quotas, usually electoral management bodies ensure compliance with quotas.

For implementation of gender quotas, civil society should function as an important watchdog. Parliamentarians and political party members may also require additional capacities and skills, such as support for women candidates in campaigning and developing the right messages and harmonizing the legislation of quotas with other laws. Finding progressive male allies among parliamentarians, political parties, and civil society members could make a notable difference in leading the awareness-raising efforts to increase women's participation in the political arena at both the national and grassroots levels.

# Resources

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## **Beijing Platform for Action**

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

## **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

## **United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) Addressing Women, Peace, and Security**

UNSCR 1325, Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))

UNSCR 1820, Adopted by the Security Council at its 5916th meeting, on 19 June 2008

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1820\(2008\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1820(2008))

UNSCR 1888, Adopted by the Security Council at its 6195th meeting on 30 September 2009

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1888\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1888(2009))

UNSCR 1889, Adopted by the Security Council at its 6196th meeting on 5 October 2009

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889(2009))

UNSCR 1960, Adopted by the Security Council at its 6453rd meeting on 16 December 2010

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1960\(2010\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1960(2010))

UNSCR 2106, Adopted by the Security Council at its 6984th meeting on 24 June 2013

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2106\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2106(2013))

UNSCR 2122, Adopted by the Security Council at its 7044th meeting on 18 October 2013

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122(2013))

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