



GENDER EQUALITY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Position paper to the 49th UN CSW

New York, 28 February – 11 March 2005

The tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women is an important opportunity for UN, international governmental organizations and governments to demonstrate a sound commitment to ensure women's human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women by the implementation of the Platform for Action and Outcome documents.

The 49th session of CSW is a critical moment for all governmental actors to effectively start an accelerated implementation of the commitments made in Beijing through allocation of appropriate financial and human resources to this task. Further, it is a strategic moment to not only link the Platform for Action to the other UN processes but to make it their integral part. KARAT Coalition* and Stability Pact Gender Task Force (SPGTF) ** which both are working on ensuring gender equality, social, economic and gender justice, gender parity in politics and participatory democracy in South, Central Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States express their concern about undermining the Beijing+10 process, Beijing Platform for Action and Beijing+5 Outcome documents by other processes dominating the UN system. Both networks are extremely concerned with the current global political situation and the rise of militarism and diverse types of fundamentalism. On one hand these phenomena serve as a pretext for neglecting women's human rights and on the other they strengthen the forces that are against women's advancement. The growing influence of conservative forces has already resulted in visible negative consequences such as decline of political and financial support for women's human rights approach. Efforts to achieve gender equality and to introduce the women's human rights perspective need to be carried out in synergy at international (UN and EU), regional and national levels.

MDGS AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC JUSTICE

KARAT and SPGTF work in the region, which belongs to two continents: Europe and Asia. All countries in which both networks are active have a similar legacy and identity. Although these countries do not belong to the group of developing countries there is still a significant development gap between them and Northern countries. As such they constitute a region, which has its specific problems, but also has capacities setting it apart from both developing and developed states. Consequently the issues of the region as such are not adequately addressed in some of the UN processes and documents. Some Millennium Development Goals are not fully relevant, while others are often not addressed by the governments of the region because they do not consider them important. Also the states still perceive themselves as recipients of foreign aid and do not apply strategic development approaches which would, inter alia, solve the poverty problems with their own resources. They are also reluctant to joining global strategies to reduce poverty. Poverty in the SEE/CEE/CIS region often takes different forms than poverty experienced by the women living in developing countries, and as such is omitted by the MDGs.

The growing inequalities in the region, the increasing gap between wealthy and poor and feminization of poverty associated with neoliberal economy and globalization are the particular concern of KARAT and SPGTF. All of the countries of this region are relative 'new comers' to the capitalist neoliberal economic system. Most of these countries of the region underwent a challenging process of privatization, signed various international trade agreements, shrunk their social security and social services systems and battled to establish democratic political systems and somehow adjust them to the local, national and global political, ideological and economic changes.

As a result, the negative economic and social trends have a substantial impact on the real life and status of women. KARAT and SPGTF express deep concern about the rapid expansion of low-tech labour-intensive, feminized sectors of the economy, as well

as of informal work of women, both associated with a patterns of abysmally low wages, workers being forced to work excessively long hours, exploitative terms of employment, denial of the right to organize and bargain collectively, sexual harassment, and physical and verbal abuse.

Access to new technologies and especially ICTs which offer immense possibilities for achieving women's rights, eliminating poverty, overcoming women's isolation, giving women a voice, improving governance and advancing gender equality are not properly taken into consideration in the region.

The trafficking of women and children is a socio-economic problem caused by poverty, discrimination and unemployment in the countries of origin and as well a severe violation of human rights, but also by the failure of the destination countries to protect people from criminal exploitation and illegal or slavery-like working conditions.

EU ENLARGEMENT – INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?

In the region the European Union (EU) enlargement process provided the dominant political context during the last few years. Although this process has positively reinforced the development of gender equalities policy in the new member states, acceding/candidate and some neighboring countries, it caused new and largely artificial political dividing lines across the continent between new member states and their neighbors with or without perspective of joining the EU.

KARAT and SPGTF are very concerned about the new process of inclusion and exclusion, which has begun – a new divide in Europe between EU and non EU countries. Women - former partners - now are divided by new borders with some of them being inside the Union and others outside it. KARAT and SPGTF proved in practice that political action towards gender equality could be strengthened through broad regional partnerships (issue based coalitions) and exchange of best practice with the strong support of EU, Council of Europe, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, OSCE/ODIHR, UN agencies and donor governments. In the new political circumstances, developing common agenda for the women in the whole Europe is crucial to prevent a new South/East-West divide. Such divide is not beneficial neither for the countries outside the EU nor for EU members. Hence the EU should accelerate their efforts to implement the new neighborhood strategy ensuring the inclusive nature of its relations to the whole Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States.

BURNING ISSUE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

KARAT and SPGTF are strongly concerned by the dramatic backlash in the area of reproductive rights and health caused by the rise of religious fundamentalisms and growing influence of conservative forces. This questions the achievement of the goals defined in Platform for Action and ICPD Program for Action. Hence the MDGs should strongly support implementation of women's reproductive rights, including their right to reproductive health. This is necessary to guarantee women's human rights. The states should be made accountable for respecting reproductive rights, including the right to safe and legal abortion.

The reproductive rights and the economic position of women are closely connected. The denial of reproductive rights (right to legal and safe abortion, family planning, etc.) impacts poor women in particular and additionally undermines poverty reduction strategies. Also there is a clear link between the reproductive rights of women and their situation at the labour market, with the employers treating women as 'risky' workers who cannot control their fertility. The guarantees that reproductive rights and reproductive health policies will be included in MDG strategies should be provided.

In the context of the Beijing+10 Review process, KARAT Coalition and Stability Pact Gender Task Force urge the governments to:

1. Fully implement the PfA as the document defining gender equality standards and commit to allocate considerable resources for its implementation;
2. Ensure that gender perspective will be mainstreamed to all processes of implementation of MDGs and treat the implementation of PfA as a precondition to achieve the MDGs;
3. Strengthen EU commitment and financial support to prevent a new West-South/East divide and support the development and implementation of joint European women human rights' agenda;
4. Address the negative impact of globalization and neoliberalism on economic and social status of women in the global economic strategies;
5. Integrate the reproductive rights perspective into the process of implementation of MDGs and fully observe reproductive rights of women, including the right to legal and safe abortion.

***KARAT Coalition** is a network of NGOs working for gender equality and social economic justice in CEE/CIS.

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