

## **STATEMENT FROM NGOs OF CEE AND CIS DISTINGUISHING COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION**

We, the women of CEE and CIS, urge the representatives of ECE member states to ensure that the particular challenges and recommendations of our sub-region are fully understood.

In particular, we bring the following issues to your attention:

- The democracies of our region remain fragile - often lacking structures, mechanisms, accountability, transparency and sustainability. Few women and women's NGOs are represented in policy and decision-making fora. The protection of women's human rights is not guaranteed for many reasons, including lack of institutional mechanisms, limited capacity, failure to understand the importance of gender aspects of all public policies, lack of financial resources and weak political will. Further, our countries lack effective legal measures and institutional mechanisms to protect women's human rights and gender equality.
- One common legacy of our former political systems is that local and national governments lack experience collaborating with civil society. Many have not yet recognized the important role played by women's NGOs. But it is noteworthy that within a relatively short period of time, women's NGOs in particular have become visible and committed representatives of civil society. In some cases, women's NGOs are providing services without appropriate government support, including financing.
- In the search for new national identities, there are strong forces advocating patriarchal traditions and models that deny women's rights and limit their roles in society. In some countries, women are pushed into the private sphere, relegated back to family responsibilities. Further, as new democracies allow greater religious expression and freedom, there are some who take advantage of these freedoms to curtail women's rights.
- Economic opportunities of women are shrinking in comparison with those of men. In some countries, women are among the first to lose their jobs, and the last to obtain new employment. Many women are working in jobs that do not utilize their education and professional skills. Many struggle in the informal sector, without benefits and protection. In some countries, women are frequently exposed to sexual harassment while also struggling to maintain their jobs. In most countries of our region, there is not a sufficient legal framework to guarantee gender equality and to protect women from gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- The process of privatization in our region has often had negative impacts on women. Both in terms of gaining access to assets and in terms of the practices of the new private sector. Further, there has been no monitoring by government to determine the gender impacts of this unique historical process.
- Today's elderly are suffering rapid impoverishment from fraying and diminishing Safety nets. All women in the region face impending poverty because their unemployment, underemployment, and informal-sector employment during the years

of transition will deprive them of their right to receive equal pension benefits and to age with dignity.

- The emergency nature of armed conflicts threatens the democratic transitions of countries-in-conflict and their neighbours because they draw international resources away from development needs to peacemaking and peacekeeping.
- Following the collapse of communism and a lack of new identity, a sudden upsurge of nationalism is threatening diversity, tolerance and peace in our region. These forces have already proved to be destabilizing. Having already destroyed many lives, they pose ongoing threats. Resources are needed to support positive use of education and media for mutual understanding and reconciliation.
- Violence against women in our region is widespread. As yet, our governments have not taken adequate action to combat and prevent violence, and to provide resources for education, shelter and legal, psychological and medical assistance for victims. Further, the laws are not sufficient to protect women. In cases of attempts to rely on the law, women often find that the courts and law enforcement agencies are not prepared to provide gender sensitive implementation.
- Civil society is new, inexperienced and under-funded. Plummeting levels of support from ECE member states, international organizations and donors jeopardize implementation of the goals and commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action in our countries. Whereas women were previously silenced by political forces, women's voices may now be silenced by insufficient resources. We appeal to donor organizations and countries to include women's organizations as equal partners in all negotiations and assistance; to support gender mainstreaming in all foreign assistance; and to maintain, and even strengthen, technical and financial assistance to countries in transition and to NGOs in order to enable them to achieve their goals. The empowerment of women in our region can be strengthened by equal partnerships with donors and other ECE partners. It is through such partnerships that women and women's NGOs have the opportunity to build skills that will serve them in public arenas.
- Throughout our sub-region, economic conditions have caused many women to be migrants within their own countries. Increased poverty in our sub-region now demands special poverty reduction measures for rural women and internal migrants. Further, women seeking employment are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking and other exploitative practices.
- Women's health, particularly reproductive health - which is a basic foundation for women to exercise their other human rights - is seriously neglected. Moreover, women's reproductive rights, particularly the right to legal and safe abortions and access to family planning and sexual education, are being constantly challenged. Such lack of information and education places women in our region in greater risk regarding HIV/AIDS.
- Following the previous sub-regional preparatory meetings, women of our sub-region's NGOs recognize the importance of their full and effective participation at all international levels. Women from our sub-region lack experience with international

organizations and processes. It would be helpful to make purposeful efforts to open up political space for us to cooperate with the rest of the ECE region.

- Having been isolated for many years from the international community, women from NGOs are not ready at this time to speak out effectively, as well as to reach mutual understanding in English or French languages. For women from the CIS, we ask the international community's support and understanding in addressing our need for regular translation and interpretation into Russian at all international and regional conferences.

We, women of countries in transition, want to participate fully in building genuine democracies. We are working hard to build cultures of peace. We appeal to governments and the international community to help us to work with our governments to promote and protect women's human rights and gender equality.

## **LIST OF ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Albania**

Women in Development Association  
Millennium Women Coalition

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

TALDI (Tuzla Agency for Local Development Initiatives)  
LARA (Bijelina)  
BOSPO (Zenica)  
Zena zenama (Women to Women, Sarajevo)

### **Bulgaria**

Women's Alliance for Development  
Nadya Centre  
Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation

### **Croatia**

Gender Task Network  
CEE Network for Gender

### **Czech Republic**

Gender Studies Centre  
Association for Equal Opportunities

### **Hungary**

Feminist Network  
Center for Democracy and Information Foundation

### **Kazakhstan**

Feminist League  
Almaty Women's Information Center

## **Kyrgyzstan**

Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan  
Rural NGO ALGA  
Association Diamond  
Women's Support Center  
Center for Women in Media of Central Asia

## **Macedonia**

Union of Women's Organizations of the Republic of Macedonia

## **Moldova**

Gender Center

## **Montenegro - FRY**

Focal Point for Gender Task Force

## **Poland**

Federation for Women and Family Planning  
Gender Studies Warsaw  
Women's Rights Center  
Women's Association for Gender Equality-Beijing 95  
Baltic Gender Center

## **Romania**

AnA - Society for Feminist Studies  
SEF - Equal Opportunities for Women

## **Russia**

Conversion and Women  
Women's Information Network

## **Slovakia**

Prospecta

## **Slovenia**

Focal Point for Stability Pact GTF  
CEE Network for Gender Issues  
Women's Forum of ULSD

## **Ukraine**

Kharkiv Women's Studies Center