



Beijing +25 Meeting: Commission on the Status of Women

President's Letter

Oakland University Model United Nations

March 27-28, 2020

Hello delegates and welcome to the fifth annual Oakland University Model United Nations' Conference! Your chair for this committee is Erica Potter, who graduated from Oakland University in 2019 with a degree in Political Science and works as a resolution analyst on a capital markets team at Quicken Loans in Detroit. Your co-chair is Conor Urban, who is a junior at Oakland University and is majoring in International Relations, French, and History. We're looking forward to guiding this innovative committee in writing an update on the Commission on the Status of Women!

The 1995 Beijing Conference was the Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the United Nations. An unprecedented 17,000 participants attended this conference, including 6,000 government delegates, 4,000 accredited NGO representatives, a multitude of international civil servants and around 4,000 media representatives. 189 UN Member states unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) as a global agenda for ensuring the improvement of human rights for women and girls.¹ The BPFA set strategic objectives for the achievement of gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern, including poverty, education and training, armed conflict, and economy.

The Beijing Declaration was widely hailed as a landmark achievement, a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women. Hillary Clinton, who was a member of the US delegation, famously announced: "If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that

¹ The complete Beijing Declaration can be found at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>

human rights are women's rights... And women's rights are human rights.”² For two decades those words have been echoed by women around the world; they became the basis for change in the status of women in some countries and resulted in seven UN resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 on Women, Peace, and Security,³ and the Millennium Development Goals, of which one of the goals is promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and improvement in maternal health.⁴

Implementation of the Beijing Declaration was left to member states. Since 1995, while women's rights and concerns have been at the forefront of numerous national and international agendas, progress has been mixed. The Beijing Declaration did not necessarily lead to full participation of women in decision making, nor did every country embrace the quota system favoring women. Not every constitution around the world recognizes women as equal citizens. Not every government has signed, let alone ratified, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Despite UNSCR 1325 and numerous other efforts, violence against women is prevalent in times of war and peace.⁵ On many scales of measurement, there is still a pronounced gender gap, including in “developed” countries that rhetorically have offered the most support to women's empowerment.

Every five years, the BPFA is reviewed and appraised by UN bodies. In 2015, which marked the Beijing Conference's 20th anniversary, the UN and other bodies published numerous reports noting areas of progress and continued concern.⁶ While most countries have made some progress on issues such as education, labor force participation, and health, significant gaps do remain. The agenda of Beijing remains relevant today, and new issues (such as women as refugees and transgender rights) have emerged.

During the [62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) in March 2018, preparations began to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration. Two resolutions pertaining to Beijing +25 were adopted for action by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Resolution E/CN.6/2018/L.6 decided that at its sixty-fourth session, in 2020, the CSW will undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the Twenty-Third special session of the General Assembly. In addition, this document called for member states to undertake comprehensive national reviews of the progress made since 1995 prior to 2020 meeting of the CSW.⁷ Numerous

² For video and text of Clinton's speech, see <https://womenintheworld.com/2015/09/04/20-years-later-revisit-hillary-clintons-womens-rights-are-human-rights-speech/>.

³ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴ See <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml> and <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/maternal.shtml>.

⁵ For a useful report that reviews Beijing after 20 years, see

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/beijing%2B20_looking_back_and_the_road_ahead.pdf.

⁶ A useful gateway for information on Beijing +20 is <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>. See also <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/02/beijing-synthesis-report>.

⁷ <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/L.6>

NGOs, which were active at Beijing 1995, are already at work preparing for the 25th anniversary review.⁸

One of the meetings of the CSW will occur on March 27-28, 2020 at Oakland University. As a delegate, you are expected to contribute to the writing of a new Action Plan that reflects accomplishments and failures since Beijing. Advocates for empowering women hope that this new document will go beyond the 1995 Declaration, both in its goals and its implementation. Others believe that the BPFA might be better modified in a different direction. Please note that all delegates assembling for this meeting are doing so in good faith to advance women's rights and empowerment. Remember, in 1995, your delegation approved the BPFA, including its opening Mission Statement (Appendix 1). **It would be both unproductive and unrealistic to question the basic premise of this meeting and the Beijing Agenda itself.** However, which rights should receive attention and how these rights can be best achieved will undoubtedly be subjects of some contention. Whether this conference produces a stronger, more effective document or a less ambitious plan is up to you.

Mechanics

Content

This committee will function as a UN Conference (like Beijing 1995) and as such will be producing a substantial written report, not a standard UN resolution or recommendation. Such a report will be in a more standard narrative form, outlining specific goals and objectives and suggesting how states and other actors might best achieve them. One can reference the 1995 BPFA itself as a template. This document, however, is over 300 pages long. Your goals for this meeting will be more modest. Rather than include a discussion of all 12 of the issue areas enumerated in the BPFA, you will focus on 4 policy areas/strategic objectives. These are: **Women and Health; Women in the Economy; Women in Power and Decision-Making; and Violence Against Women.** This meeting of the CSW may also craft and adopt a brief mission statement.

The report for each strategic objective will include a brief opening paragraph that establishes the importance of the issue, statements of strategic objectives, and statements of recommended actions (one to two sentences each), highlighting strategies for realizing the goal. See the excerpts from the BPFA for Education and Training of Women from the 1995 Declaration as a template (Appendix 2).

Agenda

Your committee will order the agenda based on the 4 sub-topics listed above. You can order the agenda all at once (Item 1, Item 2, Item 3, Item 4) or you can choose only what the first item shall be. The goal is to get through an item or agenda topic within 3 hours. Chairs will have flexibility to encourage delegates to make efficient use of time.

⁸ For websites of NGOs that are focused on Beijing +25, see, among others, <https://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/resources/beijing-25-reviews> and <https://www.wecf.org/beijing25-world-conference-on-women/>

The Written Report

The Written Report should briefly specify the nature and scope of the problem, state strategic objectives, and specify actions that member states and other actors could take (see Appendix 2 as well as the Beijing declaration itself). **We would like to see each area have at least 3 Strategic Objectives, each of which would include at least 3 actions which could be taken by governments or non-state actors.** However, there is no limit to the number of strategic objectives or recommended actions, as long as they are not redundant and can receive the requisite support from the CSW as a whole.

The report for each sub-topic shall be voted upon separately once debate on it has concluded. At the end of the meeting, a final vote on all documents assembled by this body, including, if applicable, a new Mission Statement, shall be conducted.

In order to be considered suitable for voting, a working paper for the report must have suitable content, be formatted properly (see Appendix 2 as a model) and have half of the CSW as sponsors or signatories. Once approved by the dais, a draft report can be introduced to the body in the same manner as draft resolution or recommendation in other OUMUN committees, including a Q & A session, if this makes sense in terms of time and of facilitating debate.

Voting

The 1995 BPFA was adopted unanimously. We would like to see a consensus document, but we also recognize that there are some “red lines” on some issues that some delegations will not cross. While a document adopted by consensus would have more legitimacy, we also recognize problems in that it gives each delegation veto power. **To get around this, at the OUMUN meeting, a document or report is considered passed if it has the affirmative votes of 80 percent of those delegations that vote for/against.** Put another way, abstentions will NOT count with respect to calculating whether a document has 80 percent support.

All other procedural votes shall be by simple majority.

Preparation

In addition to knowing the priorities of your country, we highly recommend that delegates come to the conference with some **specific language** they would like to see adopted in the final report. We do not expect nor want you to produce an entire document. However, it would expedite matters if delegates had some specific clauses/action statements/declarations of strategic objectives that could be introduced early in the debate. Ideally, you would use time in your speeches to share this language with the body. Again, past documents adopted by the UN can serve as a template or springboard, but we also encourage delegates to push the issue forward with new language and new priorities.

Additionally, in your position papers, we would like to see you address, at least briefly, all 4 of the topics for this meeting. Your position papers can be three pages long.

Flow of Debate

The meeting shall proceed like other MUN bodies, using the speaker's list, moderated caucuses, and unmoderated caucuses. However, because the final product of each session is expected to be a report that likely will be longer than a typical resolution and require the support of a super-majority, we do expect to utilize unmoderated caucuses more. However, these should be productive in terms of drafting papers and including as many ideas as possible. **Remember—time is your most precious resource at this meeting. Do not waste it!**

A Word of Caution

For some delegations, the precise wording in a document may be crucially important. If you have objections to content in a draft paper, please voice it. Countries may also have “red lines,” meaning that they simply could never support certain ideas or suggestions. This is fine—we want each delegate to stay in character and be accurate in portraying her/his country. At the same time, however, delegates should recognize that in international relations there is often a cost to saying no or vetoing certain ideas. For example, delegates [except perhaps Afghanistan under the Taliban] would not object, on sovereignty grounds, to a call for action that the gap in primary education between men and women be reduced. **Please remember you did approve the 1995 Declaration.** In some cases, you may seek a “win” on part of the report while compromising on another part. Such compromises are often at the heart of international negotiations. Furthermore, for the sake of time (see above), each micro-point need not be belabored if you already agree with it. The chair(s) may exercise some discretion in encouraging the body to move on or drop certain suggestions or statements if they are sure “losers”.

Questions to Consider

As you prepare, make sure you are broadly familiar with both the content and style of the Beijing Declaration. Do research on what the UN did for Beijing +20 and some of the work it is doing for Beijing +25. Be familiar with the 4 issues under consideration for this meeting, and be prepared to add to the debate and report ideas that are generated from your own country's handling of the issue. Think about what can be done, similarly or differently, from what has been done before, and what both individuals countries and the global community at large has learned since 1995. Yes, this topic has been extensively debated by the UN, but few would argue that there is nothing more to be done and all issues have been solved. Thinking about how to build on past progress and how to overcome hurdles in the way of more progress should be goals of most delegates.

As you do your research on your country and craft your position paper, you should consider the following:

- How supportive was your country of the 1995 Beijing Declaration? Was your country actively involved in its crafting? Did it meet with a positive reception in your country?
- Since 1995, has your country made progress with respect to the Beijing Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals with respect to women, and other international agreements? Has it ratified most/all international conventions in this area?

- If your country has made progress, might some of its policies serve as a template for others to adopt? Can you make positive recommendations based upon your country's recent experience?
- What are the top priorities or problems in terms of women's rights and empowerment in your country? What, if anything, is being done on these issues?
- Do you think the Beijing Declaration has been effective? If not, what are its weaknesses or problems?
- Are NGOs in your country active on these issues? What recommendations are they making? Are their ideas useful in thinking about what the UN can recommend?
- Do you wish to see a "stronger" statement than the 1995 Declaration? Or, would you prefer a more modest statement of goals? Is more necessarily better?

Appendix 1

Mission Statement of the 1995 Beijing Declaration

1. The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development. A sustained and long-term commitment is essential, so that women and men can work together for themselves, for their children and for society to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.
2. The Platform for Action reaffirms the fundamental principle set forth in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. As an agenda for action, the Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.
3. The Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender* equality around the world. It respects and values the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognizes that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment.
4. The Platform for Action requires immediate and concerted action by all to create a peaceful, just and humane world based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the principle of equality for all people of all ages and from all walks of life, and to this end, recognizes that broad-based and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development is necessary to sustain social development and social justice.
5. The success of the Platform for Action will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels. It will also require adequate mobilization of resources at the national and international levels as well as new and additional resources to the developing countries from all available funding mechanisms, including multilateral, bilateral and private sources for the advancement of women; financial resources to strengthen the capacity of national, subregional, regional and international institutions; a commitment to equal rights, equal responsibilities and equal opportunities and to the equal participation of women and men in all national, regional and international bodies and policy-making processes; and the establishment or strengthening of mechanisms at all levels for accountability to the world's women.

Appendix 2

Education and training of women Commission for the Status of Women (edited for brevity from 1995 BPFA)

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.

Progress has been made in secondary education, where equal access of girls and boys has been achieved in some countries. Enrolment of girls and women in tertiary education has increased considerably. In many countries, private schools have also played an important complementary role in improving access to education at all levels. Yet, more than five years after the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) adopted the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, approximately 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, are without access to primary schooling and more than two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults are women. The high rate of illiteracy prevailing in most developing countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa and some Arab States, remains a severe impediment to the advancement of women and to development.

Strategic objective 1. Ensure equal access to education

Actions to be taken

By Governments:

- (a) Advance the goal of equal access to education by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age or disability, or any other form of discrimination and, as appropriate, consider establishing procedures to address grievances;
- (b) By the year 2000, provide universal access to basic education and ensure completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children; close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; provide universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015;
- (c) Eliminate gender disparities in access to all areas of tertiary education by ensuring that women have equal access to career development, training, scholarships and fellowships, and by adopting positive action when appropriate;
- (d) Create a gender-sensitive educational system in order to ensure equal educational and training opportunities and full and equal participation of women in educational administration and policy- and decision-making;
- (e) Increase enrolment and retention rates of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources; by enlisting the support of parents and the community, as well as through campaigns, flexible school schedules, incentives, scholarships and other means to minimize the costs of girls' education to their families and to facilitate parents' ability to choose education for the girl child.

Strategic objective 2. Eradicate illiteracy among women

Actions to be taken by Governments, national, regional and international bodies, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organizations:

- (a) Reduce the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women and women with disabilities;
- (b) Provide universal access to, and seek to ensure gender equality in the completion of, primary education for girls by the year 2000;
- (c) Eliminate the gender gap in basic and functional literacy, as recommended in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien);
- (d) Narrow the disparities between developed and developing countries;
- (e) Encourage adult and family engagement in learning to promote total literacy for all people.

Strategic Objective 3 Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education

Actions to be taken by governments, in cooperation with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, including women's and youth organizations, and educational institutions:

- (a) Develop and implement education, training and retraining policies for women, especially young women and women re-entering the labour market, to provide skills to meet the needs of a changing socio-economic context for improving their employment opportunities;
- (b) Provide recognition to non-formal educational opportunities for girls and women in the educational system;
- (c) Provide information to women and girls on the availability and benefits of vocational training, training programmes in science and technology and programmes of continuing education;
- (d) Design educational and training programmes for women who are unemployed in order to provide them with new knowledge and skills that will enhance and broaden their employment opportunities, including self-employment, and development of their entrepreneurial skills;
- (e) Diversify vocational and technical training and improve access for and retention of girls and women in education and vocational training in such fields as science, mathematics, engineering, environmental sciences and technology, information technology and high technology, as well as management training.

Strategic Objective 4 Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms

Actions to be taken by Governments:

- (a) Provide the required budgetary resources to the educational sector, with reallocation within the educational sector to ensure increased funds for basic education, as appropriate;
- (b) Establish a mechanism at appropriate levels to monitor the implementation of educational reforms and measures in relevant ministries, and establish technical assistance programmes, as appropriate, to address issues raised by the monitoring efforts;
- (c) When necessary, mobilize additional funds from private and public institutions, foundations, research institutes and non-governmental organizations to enable girls and women, as well as boys and men on an equal basis, to complete their education, with particular emphasis on under-served populations.