WORLD CONFERENCES ON WOMEN

1975 Mexico City

The first UN World Conference on Women coincided with the International Women’s Year and served to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a persistent problem in much of the world. The following goals were established:

- Full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination;
- The integration and full participation of women in development;
- An increased contribution by women in the strengthening of world peace.

A World Plan of Action was adopted at the Mexico City Conference. This document offered guidelines for governments and the international community to follow over the next ten years to accomplish the three key objectives set by the General Assembly. The Plan of Action set minimum targets, to be met by 1980, that focused on securing equal access for women to resources including education, employment opportunities, political participation, health services, housing, nutrition and family planning. Whereas women were previously perceived as passive recipients of support and assistance, they were now viewed as full and equal partners with men, with equal rights to resources and opportunities. A similar transformation took place in the approach to development, with a shift from an earlier conception that development served to advance women, to a new consensus that development was not possible without the full participation of women.

1980 Copenhagen

At the second UN World Conference on Women, it was determined that there was a discrepancy between universal legal rights and women’s ability to exercise these rights.

The barriers were:

- Lack of sufficient involvement of men in improving women’s role in society;
- Insufficient political will;
- Lack of recognition of the value of women’s contributions to society;
- Lack of attention to the particular needs of women in planning;
- Shortage of women in decision-making positions;
- Insufficient services such as co-operatives, day-care centers and credit facilities to support the role of women in national life;
- Overall lack of necessary financial resources;
- Lack of awareness among women about the opportunities available to them.

1985 Nairobi

The Third UN World Conference on Women sought to assess the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women. Although the Women’s Movement had now become an international force unified under the banner of the “Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace”, delegates were confronted with shocking reports. Data gathered by the United Nations revealed that improvements in the status of women and efforts to reduce discrimination had benefited only a small minority of women. Improvements in the situation of women in the developing world had been marginal at best. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NFLS) to the Year 2000 was a blueprint for improving the condition of women through the end of the century. It broke new ground as it declared all issues to be women’s issues. Women’s participation in decision making and the handling of all human affairs was recognized not only as their legitimate right but as a social and political necessity that would have to be incorporated in all institutions of society.

The NFLS established the following categories as measures for achieving equality at national levels:

- Constitutional and legal steps;
- Equality in social participation;
- Equality in political participation and decision-making.

It was now recognized that women’s equality, far from being an isolated issue, encompassed every sphere of human activity. Therefore, a women’s perspective, including active involvement in all issues, not only women’s issues, was essential if the goals and objectives of the Decade for Women were to be attained.
1995 Beijing

A fundamental transformation took place at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. This was the recognition, based on the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, that women’s rights are human rights. There must be a shift of focus from “women” to the concept of “gender”, recognizing that the entire structure of society and all relations between men and women within it had to be re-evaluated.

The Beijing Conference unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) which was, in essence, an agenda for women’s empowerment. These action points stand as milestones for the advancement of women in the twenty-first century. The BPfA specified twelve critical areas of concern, the solutions to which were considered to be necessary to women’s advancement:

- Women and poverty;
- Education and training of women;
- Women and health;
- Violence against women;
- Women in armed conflict;
- Women and the economy;
- Women in power and decision-making;
- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- Human rights of women;
- Women and the media;
- Women and the environment;
- The girl child.

2000 Beijing plus Five (B+5)

The Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (23rd SSGA) produced an outcome document which listed the achievements in the advancement of women during the previous five years. It identified obstacles and current challenges to the process and strengthened the BPfA by focusing action and addressing new issues.

2005 Beijing plus Ten (B+10)

CSW 49 was a celebratory review of the implementation of the BPfA and the outcome document of the 23rd SSGA. It also looked at the current challenges and forward-looking strategies since the SSGA.

2010 Beijing plus Fifteen (B+15)

CSW 54 presented a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and BPfA and the outcomes of the 23rd SSGA. Emphasis was placed on the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On 2 March 2010 the CSW adopted a Declaration reaffirming the BPfA and the outcomes of the 23rd SSGA, calling for their full and effective implementation, and emphasizing that such implementation is essential to the achievement of the MDGs.

2015 Beijing plus Twenty (B+20)

In 2014, a twenty-year review of the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and BPfA will be held at the regional and national levels. These reviews will feed into the global review that will take place in 2015 at CSW 59.