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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL
**A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN:
EQUAL SHARING AND PARTICIPATION**

**THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY'S PRIORITIES FOR
THE FOURTH UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
Beijing, September 1995**

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Introduction

1. The world has seen enormous political, economic and social changes since the previous world conference on women, held in Nairobi ten years ago. Many aspects of women's lives have improved in the intervening decade, not least because the vital importance of their economic and social contribution is now better understood.

2. However, women still achieve this contribution in the face of formidable obstacles. Significant differentials between women and men persist in many countries in basic areas such as education, literacy, health and nutrition. Women are more likely not to be given proper financial recognition for the work they do, to be unemployed, to have sole responsibility for childcare, to be subjected to violence, to be sexually exploited, to be refugees. The heavy burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women. Throughout the world there remains a significant lack of equality between women and men in access to rights and fundamental freedoms, whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural. This continuing disparity runs counter to the principle of democracy, which presupposes the active participation of women in all spheres of public and private life.

3. A balanced society cannot be achieved without a full and equal share by women in all areas of decision-making. A strong international consensus is now emerging that advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women are cornerstones for achieving sustainable, people-centred development. Efforts to address gender disparities, and to realise a transformed partnership between women and men, are thus a necessary investment¹.

4. Despite the progress made worldwide and the international consensus on women's important role in economic and social development, the Nairobi forward-looking strategies have not yet been fulfilled. A strong renewed commitment to their achievement is therefore crucial. The World Conference in Beijing provides an opportunity to make a surge forward in the progress towards equality and a concrete improvement in women's daily lives worldwide. It will clearly signal the urgent need to accelerate action to implement the Nairobi strategies, namely through the full participation of women in all aspects of life. In addition, and most important, it will elicit the commitment of governments to take the action necessary to achieve the objectives to be agreed in Beijing.

¹ World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, March 1995)

5. The issues and actions to be agreed at Beijing are of central concern to the Community as they affect women within the European Union, in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition.

6. The Community has considerable and well-established experience in relation to the advancement of women. The principle of equal pay between women and men is enshrined in Article 119 of the Treaty establishing the European Community². It provides that 'men and women shall receive equal pay for equal work'. This principle has been developed and extended by the adoption of six Directives³ concerning equal treatment in pay, working conditions and social security, together with the health and safety at work of pregnant women. The legal framework for equality has also been complemented by a series of integrated medium-term action plans. The Union's action on the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms has its foundation in Article F of the Common Provisions in the Treaty on European Union. These principles are also expressed as one of the objectives of the Union's common foreign and security policy⁴. The central objectives of the Community's development cooperation are identified in the EC Treaty⁵. They are: sustainable economic and social development; the integration of developing countries into the world economy; the campaign against poverty; the consolidation of democracy; and respect for human rights. The fact that these objectives cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of women is underlined by the Community's main instruments in this field⁶.

7. The Community upholds the principles of equality between women and men, respect for human rights, democracy and sustainable development and is therefore determined to make a significant and effective contribution both during and after the Conference. It confirms its commitment to the measures for the advancement of women agreed during the Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. However, the Community also supports measures that go beyond the commitments of recent world conferences and believes that the forthcoming World Conference on Women is the occasion at which to insist on women's equal status with men in all aspects of life. The Community's objective is a new partnership between women and men, which integrates the full and equal participation of women in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life in order to secure equality, development and peace worldwide.

8. This Communication aims to maximise the European Union's contribution to the Beijing Conference by focussing on the principles and the strategic objectives on which the Union's coordinated position in Beijing could be based.

PRINCIPLES

General Principles

9. The Community is committed to equality between women and men as a fundamental principle and also strongly supports the empowerment of women, especially through their

² Treaty on the European Community (Rome, 1957)

³ see Annex 1

⁴ Treaty on European Union, Article J.1 2 (Maastricht, February 1992)

⁵ Introduced by the Treaty on European Union, Article 130u

⁶ Fourth Lome Convention, Regulation ALA 443/92

equal participation in decision-taking. Gender equity should not be used in a misleading way whereby it can be given a regressive and negative meaning in the context of the advancement of women. It is acceptable only when it refers to immediate action to achieve justice and equality of opportunity between women and men. Gender equity is a step towards equality and not an alternative to it.

10. Policies and measures aimed at promoting gender equality and improving women's status will not have the necessary impact unless specific measures are also introduced to ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in general policies relating to all spheres of society.

Human Rights

11. The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights⁷. They are fundamental rights that include the right to participate fully as equal partners in all aspects of life. The recognition of, and respect for, these rights is the keystone of equality between women and men and, by the same token, to the advancement of women's role in society.

12. One of the most serious violations of human rights is violence against women. It includes domestic violence, sexual harassment at work, sexual abuse and the traffic of women. Women are also at extreme risk in situations of armed conflict, whether as the victims of torture, systematic rape and other forms of violence, or as refugees or displaced persons.

Women as dynamic actors

13. The advancement of women is a goal in its own right, and is also indispensable for achieving sustainable development. Women are crucial actors in all social, economic and political processes, and must be recognised as such. Policies and programmes must focus on measures that empower women and enable them to be economically self-reliant.

Women in decision-making

14. Discriminatory attitudes and unequal power relations are prevalent in the relationships between women and men, both in the public and in the private domain. To be actors, women must be able to participate in decisions that affect them, and not be subject always to the decisions of others. The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political status are essential prerequisites to improving their capacity for freedom of choice and decision-making from grass-roots level upwards in all areas of life.

Women in the Economy

15. Economic independence is particularly important as it helps women achieve many goals: to escape from poverty and violence; to participate in decision-making; to resist discrimination. Women must therefore be assured equal access to economic opportunities, equal control over economic resources and equal treatment in areas such as employment, entrepreneurship, education and training, credit and rights of land ownership and use.

Poverty and Exclusion

16. Although poverty is more extreme in developing countries, the increasing feminisation of poverty affects all regions. The structural causes and multifaceted nature of poverty must be fully considered in the fight against poverty, which should address not only questions of

⁷ World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993)

income but also factors such as lack of control of and access to services, education, and legal rights. The empowerment of women is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty. Solidarity is essential to prevent the exclusion of many women from the mainstream of society.

Other crucial gender gaps

17. For most of the world's population, substantial gender differentials persist in such fundamental areas as nutrition, literacy, access to schooling and to primary healthcare. These differentials must be eliminated as an urgent priority.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMMUNITY

18. The overall objective of the Beijing Conference is the intermediate evaluation of the Forward-Looking Strategies and the creation of new commitments to achieve the objectives agreed in Nairobi. The draft Platform for Action to be discussed at Beijing is detailed and covers a wide range of concerns. The European Union may therefore decide in relation to the draft Platform for Action to identify and take action on a smaller number of priority areas of concern in order to demonstrate real progress by the year 2000. Like the Copenhagen Summit, a Declaration in simple, unambiguous language reflecting the main thrusts of the Platform would help focus future action.

19. During the Community's preparation for Beijing, some priority areas of concern have been identified. The Strategic Objectives for the Community address only these priority areas.

Human Rights

20. Community action on the protection and promotion of human rights is based on universal principles and on priorities agreed during recent world conferences. It extends across a wide range of instruments. These include the incorporation of specific clauses on respect for Human Rights in agreements with third countries and the allocation of financial resources through which the Community actively promotes human rights and the participation without discrimination of all individuals in society, particularly women. The Community supports the ratification and enforcement of international conventions on human rights, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, and supports progress towards the lifting of all reservations to ratification.

21. Gender-based violence exists in all societies and cultures throughout the world and is strongly interlinked with poverty. Legislation must be strengthened concerning violence, sexual harassment and the sexual exploitation of women.

22. Innovative programmes should be developed and supported to train and sensitise decision-makers and judiciaries to gender issues and women's human rights. Efforts should also be strengthened that seek to increase women's participation in conflict resolution, particularly at community level.

Women as dynamic actors

23. In addressing the inequalities between women and men, actions should reflect the role of women as dynamic actors and measures should concentrate on the 'empowerment' of women. A gender perspective should be integrated into all policies and programmes to ensure

that they do not discriminate against women. In line with their role as actors, women must also be able to participate in the formulation, implementation and review of all policies and programmes that have an impact on their lives. It should be recognised that women are not a homogeneous group and policies must address the differing needs of women. Some may face additional barriers due to age, disability, race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. They may be migrants or refugees. They may live in rural or remote areas or in inner cities.

24. For example, the Community's policy and practice is to mainstream a gender perspective throughout its development cooperation. The aim is to ensure that its activities in this field are responsive to local women's needs and priorities, that women benefit equally with men, and that they can participate fully in the design and implementation of development projects. This does not exclude the need to take specific large-scale action in favour of women where necessary, particularly to address serious gender gaps.

25. While recognising the principle of freedom of expression, measures should be supported that encourage the media to reflect the changing role of women and not to perpetuate distorted and damaging stereotypes.

26. Measures should also be supported that strengthen the role of non-governmental organisations in their empowerment of women, both at grass roots level and in their contribution to the development and assessment of local, national and international policies and programmes.

Women and Decision-making

27. Women are still a small minority in all spheres of senior management, whether in Government, in public or private organisations, in employees' associations, in academic life. Action must be supported that encourages and accelerates women's participation in decision-making in all public and political bodies, including organisations of the social partners. In particular, reviews should be conducted of criteria for appointment to committees and governing bodies, and for promotion to senior positions, to ensure that these criteria are relevant and do not discriminate against women.

28. In the context of its development co-operation, the Community has a special interest in supporting the consolidation of democracy and in promoting good governance and accountability. Women's access to decision-making is an important indicator of democracy. Support should be continued to training, networking and information exchanges that encourage and enable women to participate in decision-making at all levels. Recognising the importance of developing civil society, special attention should be paid to capacity-building and to the strengthening of grass-roots and community-based women's organisations and of decentralised local institutions. Particular consideration should be given to support for national machineries and networks, both between and within developing countries, to assist linkages between women's machineries and movements, and national and local policy-making.

29. It is essential that women have a full and effective involvement in all decisions that affect them, in the private, as well as the public, sphere. In this regard, women throughout the world must have the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so⁸.

Women and the Economy

30. The Commission's recently published White Papers⁹ underline the fundamental importance of women's contribution to the economy for future stability and growth. In addition, the

⁸ International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994

⁹ see Annex 2

Copenhagen Social Summit has acknowledged that sustainable economic development cannot be secured without the full participation of women.

31. At present, the labour market segregates women into jobs that are characterised by low pay, low skill levels and little job security. Many women work part-time. Women must have equal access to the labour market. Measures must therefore be taken to redress the horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market and encourage a recognition and valuing of women's skills and their essential contribution to economic growth. Actions should also stimulate the revision of job classification and job evaluation schemes to ensure that women and men receive equal pay for work of equal value.

32. Women's unremunerated contribution to the economy, whether in family enterprises, community service or domestic work must be given proper recognition. In addition, changes should be encouraged in the organisation of work to ensure an equitable distribution between women and men of work responsibilities and household duties. Measures should also be supported that enable people to reconcile personal, social and professional responsibilities. The need to combine family care with economic activity commonly results in an exhausting workload for women. Research and actions promoted within the Union on the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities is being widened and reinforced by forthcoming programmes for employment and equal opportunities. The Community will also seek in its development co-operation activities to alleviate the problem of dual workload through sensitive project design, promotion of appropriate technology and improving women's income-generating opportunities.

33. In developing countries, women often combine several economic activities. These range from wage labour and subsistence farming to entrepreneurship, as well as employment in more industrialised areas. For example, women play a major role in agricultural production and the informal sector. Their economic contribution is only now beginning to be perceived as vital. At the same time, they face particular legal and social obstacles in access to land ownership, credit, training and markets.

34. Programmes should be continued and developed which facilitate the removal of these barriers and which integrate women as full participants. This will help to release the economic potential of women. In the policy area, special attention should be devoted to the formulation of gender-sensitive macro-economic strategies, particularly in relation to structural adjustment. Support should be provided to programmes by developing countries aimed at assessing women's contribution to their economies and at improving official economic data sources to ensure that this contribution is accurately reflected.

Poverty and exclusion

35. Social security systems should be created where they do not exist, and all social security systems should allow the recognition of women as individual contributors in their own right rather than treating them automatically as dependants.

36. The effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes is often dependent on the contribution of women, both in the design of programmes and as participants in them. Accordingly, all anti-poverty programmes must prioritise women's basic social and economic needs. In particular, development programmes must continue to support women's pivotal role in poverty alleviation, both as major producers of food and as family managers, by ensuring their equal access to economic resources and opportunities.

37. In the context of refugee and emergency relief, particular attention should be paid to women's major roles in handling and distributing emergency food and commodities, and their capacity to assume new socio-economic roles in situations of crisis.

Other crucial gender gaps

38. Women's health must be addressed throughout the life cycle, emphasising women as important health providers, with particular attention to maternal mortality and AIDS, and consistent with the conclusions of the Cairo Conference. Primary health services must be available, affordable and accessible to women. Likewise, priority must be given to ensuring girls' equal access to primary and secondary education and reducing female illiteracy. Women's access to vocational training and appropriate technology are also important issues. Finally, women's role in the complex interrelationship between population, resources, the environment and development is vital, and cannot be neglected if sustainable development is to be attained.

39. The Community seeks particularly to achieve a better understanding of the perspectives of women from different cultures and regions on their priorities and needs. The very rich process of consultation and debate in the preparation of the Beijing Conference has contributed greatly to this aim. The Community will continue to pursue this objective in its contacts with women's machineries and organisations in all regions.

MEANS: RESOURCES AND FOLLOW-UP

40. The success of the Platform for Action agreed at Beijing will require a strong political commitment from all concerned, as well as readiness to accept institutional change and to reform legal frameworks. However, the best conceived strategies for the advancement of women will not be successful unless they are also underpinned by the allocation of financial resources and by the establishment of well-designed mechanisms to implement the Platform for Action and to monitor progress.

41. Primary responsibility for the advancement of women must lie with governments. They will need to address the issue both at a national level and in terms of the resources made available for development cooperation. The role of regional and international organisations is increasingly relevant in a globalised society, but their main purpose must be to support efforts at national level. The generation of the necessary funds will come in some cases from an increase, and in other cases from a reallocation, of existing resources, particularly a reduction in defence spending when it is excessive. However, the whole subject of the advancement of women needs to be looked at in the wider context of sound domestic and development cooperation policies that recognise, value and benefit from the contribution of women. In particular, there is a pressing need for better accountability and monitoring of the impact on women of all policies and expenditure programmes.

42. The Community will need to consider its approach to the question of resourcing and follow-up at many levels: within the Community's own institutions, at Member State level, in relation to action by international institutions, and in relation to encouraging and supporting action by partner governments in development co-operation, as well as governments of countries with economies in transition.

43. The question of follow-up will have to be considered in more detail after the conclusion of the Beijing Conference. The Vienna Regional Platform identifies the European Union among the bodies charged with monitoring its implementation. In the context of its development co-operation programming, the Community will also need to take into account the priorities identified in other regional platforms. In this connection, the Commission is in the process of elaborating a clear, updated and comprehensive policy document on gender and development for the Community and the Member States.

CONCLUSIONS

44. The final objective for the Community is the achievement of a new partnership between women and men, entailing equal sharing of power and responsibility in the public and private domains. Such partnership will require the acknowledgement of women's fundamental rights,

the full and equal participation of women in the decision-making process and their economic empowerment. It is closely interlinked with the consolidation of democracy. This new partnership with the full and equal participation of women must naturally lead to a situation of parity democracy in all areas of decision-making. However, before such parity is achieved, concrete measures will be required to ensure that women's specific needs and interests are fully integrated into the mainstream of general policy development, implementation and evaluation.

45. The World Conference in Beijing, like its predecessors in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi, will be an event of major significance for women throughout the world. In 1975, the Community took a lead in legislating for equal pay between women and men. Recently, before the European Parliament, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to equality of opportunity for women and men. The Community is demonstrating its commitment to women's empowerment in its development co-operation policies and programmes in all regions of the world. Now the Community must seize this opportunity provided by the Beijing Conference to prove its determination to continue taking a vital lead in the advancement of women worldwide and securing a transformed partnership between women and men based on equality and empowerment.

ANNEX
to the draft Communication on the Fourth UN Conference on Women

1. EQUALITY DIRECTIVES

75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women : OJ L 45, 19.2.1975

76/207/EEC of 9 February 1976 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion and working conditions : OJ L 39, 14.2.1976

79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security : OJ L 6, 10.1.1979

86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes : OJ L 225, 12.8.1986

86/613/EEC of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment for men and women engaged in an activity including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood : OJ L 359, 19.12.1986

92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding : OJ L 348, 28.11.1992

2. WHITE PAPERS

Growth, Competitiveness, Employment : The Challenges and Ways forward into the 21st century. 1994 - ISBN 92-826-7423-1

European Social Policy : A Way Forward for the Union. 1994 - ISBN 92-826-8526-8