

InterAction

FPA INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT - A UNIT WITHIN THE NEW ZEALAND FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Beijing Declaration Stands Strong

Last month was a critical milestone for women's rights globally, marking the 10th anniversary and review of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, where the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) was signed. NZFPA Executive Director Dr Gill Greer was in New York at the review, as part of the official NZ delegation led by Minister of Women's Affairs Ruth Dyson. FPAID manager Eileen Kelly also attended, as an NGO observer.



Photo courtesy of Office of Hon. Ruth Dyson

Hon. Ruth Dyson at Beijing+10, UN Headquarters, New York

Ten years ago in Beijing, China, a UN World Conference on Women took place at which intense debate, advocacy and protest finally resulted in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). This World Conference and the BPFA reflected the global coming of age of the women's movements and a recognition that equality between men and women was a moral, economic, social and political necessity as well as a human right.

Last month, from February 28 to March 11, the 10th anniversary of the BPFA took place during the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at UN Headquarters in New York. Dubbed 'Beijing+10' in UN-speak, this meeting to review the BPFA and the outcomes of the Beijing+5 meeting of 1999 was attended by

6,000 women and government ministers, who worked (and struggled) on the issues, and was opened with strong supporting statements from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

The BPFA was adopted unanimously by 189 countries, and is particularly important because it was a major human rights accomplishment for women everywhere. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action provide a policy framework based on human rights following the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. They invoke the substance and language of human rights in every section, and refer specifically to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination

Beijing Platform for Action: 12 Areas of Concern

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women and health
- Violence against women
- Women and 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.

against Women (CEDAW) as well as to other human rights treaties.

The BPFA is, however, vulnerable to changes in political or economic climate that can erode commitment to achieving its goals at the national level. National governments achieve the goals of the BPFA through a combination of political will, and support and pressure from their NGOs and civil society groups, combined with international pressure.

The Beijing+10 review was the final stage in a series of regional BPFA review meetings held across the globe throughout 2004. Each of the regional meetings reaffirmed the Beijing documents, comprehensively assessed progress towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the last decade, and identified current challenges and the best forward-looking strategies to meet those challenges.

Alongside each of the official regional meetings, women's groups and NGOs played important support and advocacy roles. FPAID was present at the UN Economic Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) regional meeting in Bangkok in September 2004, and at the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum in Bangkok in June. In the months leading up to Beijing+10, FPAID also took the leading role in coordinating contributions from a variety of women's organisations and individual women towards a NZ NGO shadow report for Beijing+10. This was used by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women and by the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) for their international advocacy

work. The WEDO version is available at: <http://www.wedo.org/files/gmr2005.html>

Question of abortion threatens to stalemate Beijing+10

Although the opening statements by governments were mostly strongly supportive and spoke of the considerable progress achieved, the CSW was marked by US opposition to reaffirmation of the BPFA. The US position was initially supported by the Holy See, Qatar, Egypt and some conservative Christian civil society groups. Official support dwindled as the week went on however, and the US was gradually isolated in its stance. The reason for US opposition was the BPFA's promotion of sexual and reproductive rights, and in particular the issue of access to safe and legal abortion. The US claimed reaffirming the Declaration and Platform for Action would lead to the creation of new international human rights, and in particular the right to abortion.

All other government delegations responded by stating their unqualified support for the BPFA, pointing out that the Beijing documents clearly state that changes in national laws relating to abortion are a matter for national governments to decide. Furthermore, the Beijing+5 Outcome documents explicitly state: "In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the health impact of

unsafe abortion (in countries where it is legal) as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family-planning services."

Despite intense pressure, the US failed to break solid international consensus supporting reaffirmation of the BPFA as a framework for progress, and eventually withdrew its controversial proposed amendment to the Draft Declaration of the Beijing +10 proceedings.

BPFA reaffirmed

Once the Political Declaration was adopted, the delegations and participants were able to finally turn their attention to addressing current challenges and establishing forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls. Governments filed a number of resolutions on current issues for women around the world, including economic empowerment, gender mainstreaming, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, tsunami disaster response, and armed conflict.

A few organisations have voiced dismay that more was not achieved for women at Beijing+10. However, while it might seem a minor achievement, within the current political context in the UN, reaffirmation of the BPFA is a key statement that the Declaration stands strong despite opposition from conservative groups, and that it is an important document that recognises and advances women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

New Zealand Government's Role

On 1 March, **Hon. Ruth Dyson** spoke as Minister of Women's Affairs to the CSW. She stated that intensified political will was required to make real progress towards full equality for men and women. Many NGOs and other delegations were, like FPAID, pleased to hear the Minister speak strongly in favour of sexual and reproductive health and rights: "New Zealand also strongly supports the sexual and reproductive health rights identified at Cairo and Beijing. Too often women suffer or die in circumstances that are preventable...Beijing contains clear commitments on women's sexual and reproductive health rights, and the right to control their own sexuality, and these commitments must be implemented."

On 4 March, **Don Mackay**, New Zealand's Permanent Representative to the UN, spoke on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the position of the three countries. In direct reference to the painful debate over language around sexual and reproductive rights, which the US promoted through its amendment, he stated: "We should not spend hours splitting hairs over phrases that mean essentially the same thing, while women continue to suffer in poverty and hardship... We are united in our conviction that violence against women is inexcusable and must be eliminated. We are united in our support for women's right to control their own sexuality."



Eileen Kelly (FPAID Manager) describes the role of NGOs at the CSW

In addition to the New Zealand government delegation there were four NGO participants at the CSW, three from church groups and myself representing the reproductive health and development sector. Assisted by a travel grant from NZAID through the Council for International Development, I was privileged to participate in the full process of reaffirming the BPFA, and contributing towards ensuring that the resolutions passed in the second week contained the appropriate wording and were in line with the New Zealand position.

The process was greatly facilitated by open and clear communication from the New Zealand delegation led by Hon. Ruth Dyson, and generously assisted by the permanent staff at the New Zealand Mission in New York. The delegation and the NGO representatives were in close contact throughout the session and were able to share information as it came to hand from both governments and civil society groups.

The volume of work and the UN processes would have been overwhelming if I had not been fortunate enough to attend both the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing+10 and the UN ESCAP Regional Conference in Bangkok last year. Training in UN processes and how to lobby at the UN was conducted at both these conferences, and is a definite prerequisite for anyone participating at UN meetings.

I left New York proud and satisfied that despite the challenges still facing women globally, New Zealand had shown leadership and firmly stated its position in a positive and empowering manner.



NZPPD Open Hearing on Violence against Women and Children in NZ

On 7 March FPAID, as Secretariat for the NZ Parliamentarians group on Population and Development (NZPPD), coordinated a Parliamentary Open Hearing into violence against women and children in New Zealand.

Convened by NZPPD Chair Steve Chadwick, seven MPs heard submissions by community organisations and government agencies involved in stopping the violence and providing support to victims. The MPs were also able to ask questions and seek clarification about why violence against women and children has not been decreasing, and how community organisations can be supported to be more effective.



The New Zealand All-Party Parliamentary Group

The following day (International Women's Day) the media reported that as an outcome of the open hearing, members of the NZPPD are formulating an action plan to ensure the New Zealand government fulfills both its domestic and international commitments on this issue.

Some of the key recommendations to come out of the hearing were for more resources to be directed towards agencies, especially community organisations experienced in addressing gender violence, the need for better coordination and improved access to information, the need to encourage community responsibility, and the need for more gender analysis in order for the public to understand the problems and for appropriate actions to be put in place. A draft report was presented to a workshop on violence hosted by Hon. Steve Maharey and Hon. Ruth Dyson on 31 March.

Some sobering facts:

Over the past 30 years, more than 900 women and children have been murdered in NZ

33% of Auckland women and 39% of rural Waikato women have experienced at least one act of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their life

15% of women have experienced intimate partner violence that has led to hospitalisation

Violence against women and children has large economic costs. One study in 1994 showed NZ\$22.9 million per annum was lost in working days and productivity

Children who experience violence or neglect, particularly in the first few years, suffer damage to aspects of their brain development - notably social and emotional development

FPAID UPDATES

FPAID takes on APA Secretariat

FPAID is currently acting as secretariat for the Asia Pacific Alliance: Advancing the ICPD Agenda (APA). This is an interim role until a permanent secretariat is appointed at the end of the year. NZFPA Executive Director Dr Gill Greer has taken on the role of APA Steering Committee Chair.

Formed in 1999, APA is a network of population, development and environmental NGOs, as well as official development assistance representatives from Pacific Rim donor countries. APA's overarching goal is to increase support for the population, sexual and reproductive health, environmental and development objectives agreed in the ICPD Programme of Action and Millennium Development Goals.

Visit www.asiapacificalliance.org for more information.



Welcome Joanna Spratt

Joanna Spratt has joined FPAID as Pacific Programme Manager, replacing Emma Dunlop-Bennett. Joanna has a Master in Development Studies with a focus on Pacific health, is a qualified nurse and has a Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health. She has practised as a nurse in several countries, including Romania and the UK.



Joanna Spratt

Welcome Luse Qereqeretabua

Luse Qereqeretabua has joined FPAID in the Pacific regional office in Suva, where she is coordinating FPAID's Pacific projects, carrying out advocacy work with regional and local stakeholders, and supporting the capacity of IPPF member family health associations in the Pacific.

Luse Qereqeretabua



Farewell Emma Dunlop-Bennett

FPAID warmly thanks and farewells Pacific Programme Manager Emma Dunlop-Bennett, who has worked at FPAID for five years. Emma has accepted a position at NZAID where she will continue to work on issues of development in the Pacific.

SRH leaders visit Wellington

UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Obaid and IPPF Director-General Dr Steven Sinding both visited Wellington last month, meeting with Ministers, parliamentarians, government officials, and NGOs working on sexual and reproductive health in developing countries. Ms Obaid was here as a government VIP, with FPAID heavily involved in her programme. A week later, FPAID hosted the visit by Dr Sinding. Activities FPAID organised for both included well-attended NGO forums, meetings with members of the New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD), and radio interviews including segments on Radio New Zealand's *Nine To Noon*.

NZFPA gains ECOSOC status

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has granted special consultative status to NZFPA. This means NZFPA can now designate official representatives to UN meetings.

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Input Are there any topics that you would like to see included in future?

