



# World Chronicle

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## Women and the Beijing Platform

Ten year ago in China, the international feminist movement laid out an agenda aimed at the empowerment of women worldwide: the Beijing Platform for Action.

But how much action has there really been over the last decade to advance the rights of women? Have the Millennium Development Goals obscured the aims of the Beijing Platform? Is there any chance of a positive outcome for gender relations from the chaos and devastation of the Asian tsunami?

These are some of the issues discussed in this episode of World Chronicle with Noleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

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**ANNOUNCER:** From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**WILLIAMS:** Hello, I'm Mary Alice Williams.

Ten year ago, in Beijing, China, the international feminist movement laid out an agenda aimed at the empowerment of women worldwide: the Beijing Platform for Action.

But how much action has there really been – over the last decade – to advance the rights of women? We'll be discussing that with the Executive Director of UNIFEM -- the United Nations Development Fund for Women -- Noeleen Heyzer. Welcome to World Chronicle.

The Beijing Platform included: freedom for political participation, access to education, employment, healthcare and freedom from violence. Has any action taken place?

**HEYZER:** Yes Mary, I am very pleased to say that there has been action. There has been action when governments in fact, have created national active plans to make sure that there is an adequate resource allocation. In fact, about one hundred and twenty countries today have national plans; to make sure that there will be differences made in the everyday lives of women - at the same time, it's not enough. The action taken is not enough. It is not enough when today, the HIV/AIDS pandemic still has a woman's face. It is not enough when there are still many women and girls who are victims of violence, especially in the situation of war. It is not enough when one million girls and women are trafficked every year. So, what we have in terms of the action – would be the legal framework, the policy framework, that we have had enough of. That's no longer a situation of awareness building, it's no longer a situation of developing at the policy level, it is a situation of implementation, of policies, and the legal framework on the ground. Making sure women have land rights for example.

**WILLIAMS:** Joining us in the studio today are Laura Angela Bagnetto of the Saudi Press Service ... and Susannah Price of the BBC. Suzie...

**PRICE:** You're talking about the problem of the implementation, but how much is that still a failure of the governments will? The governments have promised to do these things but they are not pushing them forward. Or how much is it a lack of resources, a lack of the actual world's development projects going on that is holding things up?

**HEYZER:** I think you need to look at progress in a different way. You need to look at what is it that will facilitate progress and what would hinder progress. To look at the kinds of gains that have been made and what in fact would create the loss of those gains. So I would put it in a slightly different context, to say look at the nature of the States, but the states do not function in isolation. The states function in an international context of globalization, of fragmentation, of problems without borders. And at the same time, the state themselves are not the only players. You have the state being a powerful player, but you also have private sector. You have to look at the conditions of work that the private sector in fact would create for the world's women. You need to look at civil society; you need to look at the empowerment of women themselves, your agenda, people who are really engaged with making the transformation in women's lives. So I would say the state has tremendous responsibility and that's extremely important and at this present moment, there are not sufficient resources that have been allocated by the donors and also by the programme countries on moving the agenda for women's empowerment.

**BAGNETTO:** Well I want to go off from there and to ask you when you're dealing with a hundred and ninety one member states here at the United Nations; there are many differences of opinion including culture and religion. So how do you deal with that and deal with the states trying to implement these programmes that you're talking about?

**HEYZER:** There is no culture or religion that would condone violence against women. So the most important thing is to look at what is intrinsic in the culture and in the religion that moves progress, and not to identify with the extremists interpretation of religion and culture that actually hinders progress. Because that is only one way to look at how things are interpreted. So we need to look at the diversity, to look at different forms of interpretation and women themselves, many of these cultures have taken the lead. In Morocco, we have been able to assist many of the women's group and the government themselves to change, for example, family code. There are today - we have a quota of women participating in parliament; and in Afghanistan - we saw something that we never thought we would see – about three years ago – women voting; and in Iraq as well you will find situations of women participating politically. So I would say there are many different ways of interpreting what culture and religious values are. But at the end of the day, we need to take women's voices and women's strength into that interpretation.

**WILLIAMS:** We've seen women voting in Afghanistan, women voting in Iraq, something as you said that we could never have fathom even quite recently. But does that translate to political power?

**HEYZER:** You know, it is a first step. In fact, let me say that this first step is absolutely necessary. For example, in Rwanda; today, if we asked which countries for example, would have the highest percentage of women in Parliament...it's no longer the Scandinavian countries. It's Rwanda at forty-nine percent. What they did, they changed the inheritance law and they made sure that women owned land so that the agriculture sector could be revitalized. Because most of the women are still employed in the agriculture sector. So it really depends on what women do when they occupy power positions. In fact, in India, the Panchayat system, when the village women came into village counsels they immediately looked into the village budget and said what happened to the wells? What happened to the schools? What happened to our roads? So it's really empowering women to make sure when they occupy these positions, they turn it into power.

**PRICE:** Have you seen a change over the past ten years in terms of the civil society, in terms of women's group on the ground, the NGOs, the smaller pressure groups? Do

you feel that they are getting more power? Do they have a sense that they can make a difference and that they can change things? And are their governments listening to them?

**HEYZER:** You know, what has been very good is that what I see now, is that there are innovations that have been created by tremendous women who are working on the ground level and one of the challenges would be to make sure that these innovations becomes standard practice at the governmental level. And in some areas, it has been working. For example, the gender budget analysis. At one stage, it was still at the margin of women's movement and women's thinking but eventually, it went into a way of looking at transparency and the whole budget process; and for example, recently, the government of India insisted that all its eighteen departments use a gender budget analysis. In the same way, if I look at the issue of ending violence against women, here the women's advocates have really moved the agenda forward. Because at one stage, the issue of gender based violence was seen as a culture issue, was seen as an issue between the men as well as the household. But today, it's seen as a violation of women's human rights, it's seen as a criminal issue and men are brought in as partners. So in a way, what I've seen is that there is movement, but again, not enough where it matters.

**BAGNETTO:** What I was interested in talking about... the UN has declared 2005 the Year of Micro-Credit and women are a very important part of this action because they are the ones who are receiving the micro-credit. I was wondering if you could talk briefly about that.

**HEYZER:** Yeah, I think that it is extremely important to make sure that women have access to money and in many of these cases, it's not just the access to money but it is also a way of ensuring that women engage in decision-making in the household and so on. But I think we have to go beyond micro-credit to make sure that they have access to markets, they have good working conditions. Many women work in the wage sector, in the informal sector and what we're asking for – if in 2005 a way of getting out of poverty is to make sure that all the gender gaps and income between men and women are closed – in wherever these countries are - then immediately you are able to get women out of poverty. So micro-credit is one way, but we need also to look at other ways of getting women out of poverty.

**WILLIAMS:** All bets are off in a war situation. UNIFEM has supported legal efforts to make rape as a weapon of war, as a crime against humanity. This is not new, but it seems to be accelerated in many situations. The warriors who are raping women are eighty percent HIV positive, so they become killing machines. What happens to all these good intentions if that sector is not handled?

**HEYZER:** That is a very, very important issue because at the end of the day, whilst we have the laws, whilst we have a movement towards awareness, at the end of the day, action has to take place in terms of ending impunity. In fact, because the nature of warfare has changed, you'll find that wars are fought in the communities, it's fought on women's bodies – weapons of war has used violence against women – violence against women is a weapon of war that is used to humiliate the other side and men of the other side. And also to destroy the capacity of communities to revitalize them; if there is no ending of impunity of these crimes and as long as these crimes are treated as minor crimes, we're not going to get there. So, the ICC, The International Criminal Court, has a statute that deals with this particular issue, but at the same time, it is so important that we also strengthen the rule of law and institutions at the national level to make sure that justice is not sacrificed at the peace table.

**WILLIAMS:** When you say the International Court has statutes, is it a crime against humanity?

**HEYZER:** It is a crime against humanity. Yes.

**PRICE:** When you talk of war, are there special provisions, or how much are you pushing for special provisions for women after a war situation? I mean there seems to be so many problems not only after the rape – and we have read some terrible reports in Darfur for example of the families there – also even the ex-combatant women, the child soldiers, do you feel there should be more of an effort to specifically focus on women in a post conflict situation?

**HEYZER:** Absolutely, Susie...and you have covered Darfur very, very well. And I must say that there are a whole variety of issues that needs to be attended to simultaneously. Firstly, women have to not only be a part of the peace table, but they have to be involved with the implementation and the reconstruction of their country. Which means, that they have to get engaged with the constitutional reform process with the rule of law, sectors, they also have to make sure that the issue of gender justice is addressed, and there are three kinds of justice issues. One is what happens to women after they have experienced this kind of violence. What about the truth and reconciliation process? And that is so important in terms of building trust - of rebuilding communities at the ground level. What happens in terms of economic recovery, the economic security and rights that have to be put in place? What happens to the internally displaced people? In many of the countries that I have visited there are millions of internally displaced people but there are no communities and no functioning economy to integrate them. In the same way, the ex-combatants are no longer men. We all know that the nature of fighting forces has changed. They include children, they include women - not only those who have been kidnapped but also those who – maybe because of survival as a form of

protection – have joined the fighting forces. Therefore, the whole nature of what constitutes a combatant has to change and therefore, the DDR process and the disarmament and the whole process of re-integration, we need to put at the center, the whole issue of women and girls.

**BAGNETTO:** You speak about the truth and reconciliation process, which has had some success in Rwanda, for instance. But I was wondering if you could address the subject of sexual abuse and after the fact of psychological counseling which is something which is not addressed as much as it should be. And I was wondering if you could also talk about how UNIFEM administers the UN trust fund to eliminate violence against women. Would that fund also address or the monies in that fund address psychological counseling?

**HEYZER:** You know Laura, the issue of counseling is so important because it's not just the individual women who have to be taken out of a context to be counseled. The way we do trauma counseling has to engage the community and it has to engage the men. It's not just the women who are traumatized, it is the men too who have watched the women, who have to watch their daughters or their wives being raped, while equally traumatized. Shame and silence have been broken but at the same time, there is a stigma around rape babies and what happens to these babies. There's still a lot of stigma in terms of re-integration of women who have been raped, and therefore, it has to be a community healing process. And one of the healing process is to normalize – in a sense make sure that people engage with economic security, they engage with the everyday rhythm of community life, and here faith based organizations are extremely important. In Timor Leste, I remember talking to Bishop Belo and he said what have I got to do with ending violence against women? And I said, 'everything!' because you need to speak from your pulpit to the communities, to the men in your parish and you need to make sure that there is understanding of what has gone on. So I would say definitely trauma counseling but trauma counseling in the community context and the trust fund to end violence against women. This is a trust fund that has been set up by the General Assemble and we have been very happy that we today we do have resources, but not enough. Every year, we have a demand of about fifteen million but we have one million dollars to supply in terms of grants. This trust fund basically works with implementation of laws – forty five countries have laws to end violence against women. We need to make sure that they have the resources and also the effective strategies to make sure these laws get implemented.

**WILLIAMS:** This is World Chronicle and our guest in Noleen Heyzer of the United Nations Development Fund for Women – UNIFEM. Let's take a moment now to look at this report of health issues facing women in Asia who have been made homeless by the tsunami.

## VIDEO BEGINS

**NARRATION:** “Rosmawati lost her home and all her possessions to the tsunami. Separated from her husband and children, she escaped the raging waters by climbing up to the rooftop of her local mosque. Today, she’s one of 470,000 people left homeless in Aceh province of Indonesia.”

Rosmawati joined thousands of others in overcrowded makeshift camps. While conditions are difficult for everyone – poor nutrition...health...sanitation – the women here face unique challenges.

Like having to bathe in public...a source of shame and discomfort as well as a daily reminder of their vulnerability as homeless women.

And there’s the danger of childbirth. With little or no access to hospitals, nearly a thousand women like this one – pregnant with her sixth child – will likely give birth this month in Aceh’s camps ...with no privacy and without the proper medical attention in case of complications.

Islamic relief groups and the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, work feverishly to try and meet their needs.

**NANKOE:** “We are trying to provide, clean delivery kits and other basics that health providers need, including midwives, to help people give birth as safely as possible”.

**NARRATION:** But the needs are great for all women in this region. They’re desperate for even the most mundane necessities of life.

**NANKOE:** “On the other hand, we are providing hygiene kits which include soap, towels, toothbrushes and sanitary napkins, underwear...”

**NARRATION:** Over 36,000 hygiene kits are being distributed to women throughout the campus. Rosmawati has just received hers.

**ROSMAWATI:** “This we can use for praying...and for sleeping in”.

**NARRATION:** Today, Rosmawati is living in a smaller camp, with a little more privacy. Beside her...her family. She found her husband, young son and daughter in a frantic search in the days following the tsunami.

A devout Muslim, she tries hard to maintain the rhythms of a normal life amid the chaos. But as they work to rebuild their lives there’s something else Rosmawati believes is essential during this crisis...family planning.

**ROSMAWATI:** “Without contraceptives, we’d have more children, and we wouldn’t be able to raise them and educate them properly...it would backfire on our community”.

**NARRATION:** A community where even little things mean so much. A community desperate to regain the lives they lost.

**VIDEO ENDS**

**WILLIAMS:** Noleen, you have just returned from the tsunami ravished region. Is there a possibility of a constructive outcome for women as they rebuild their lives in Sri Lanka and Banda Aceh?

**HEYZER:** I was in Aceh just two weeks after the tsunami struck and what was extremely clear to me is first of all, Aceh is a community that has a dynamic organization of civil society. And we need to make sure that civil society and women’s networks are supported and are able to identify needs and priorities and be part of the solution – they’re not just victims. That is so extremely important because it is the re-engagement, the serious engagement of community organizing and community networks....

**WILLIAMS:** But they need everything. They lost their hospitals, they have no medication, and they hardly have basic hygiene. So how do you even begin that process?

**HEYZER:** The thing is that they have needs, so the most important thing is to engage them to identify – for example – where do they want to stay? Because what we have seen here is that we see people in refugee camps and internally displaced camps, but there are also those who are not in camps; who are living with families, who actually have lost everything, their livelihoods and also the tearing apart of communities support networks. And therefore, it is extremely important that we engage them to find out what are their needs? What are their priorities and what solutions do they see as responding to those needs and to the priorities that they have identified?

**PRICE:** Do you think that a large number of different aid organizations who’ve gone out to those regions...do you think they are listening to those women? I mean, it was very interesting in that film talking about family planning, for example, there are certain priorities you wouldn’t necessarily think of to being with. And I also heard of some women in some camps, who really for example, didn’t want to wear second hand clothes. They felt that was awful, shameful but yet, from the West, you’d think probably, let’s send out all this aid, they must be so grateful for whatever they get. So do you think aid agencies are listening and what they are saying?

**HEYZER:** I think they are doing it, but not in a way that is fully – I would say....full engagement. In other words, you have to put these people in the driver’s seat in terms of the



solution that they would like to see. Because it is part of that engagement that will help them with the recovery process; and equally important is to look at – what are their top priorities? And there are three top priorities: Firstly, the whole issue of resettlement. They want to be resettled in a way that will be able to pull together whatever or whoever remains of their families; and there are many different kinds of families - men without women, children without parents, grandparents with children, orphans; so there are different forms of families. The way they can reshape their homes can be extremely important. I think people do not just want to remain in barracks or in internally displaced camps; they want to begin to be engaged with the reshaping. They want their communities to be located next to their livelihoods. They want land. In fact, one of the things that we have not heard, but one of the issues that many women spoke to me about, was the fact that they do not have land titles. It's the fact that they can not begin to grow if they do not own land, and therefore again, how do we make sure that the issues they have identified, in terms of livelihoods, would be attended to together with the whole issues of homes. But equally important is to realize that two of the highest hit countries of the tsunami sit on conflict and relief and reconstruction in Aceh which we have seen, is within the context of civil emergency. And therefore the whole issue of security is an extremely important one. I mean, we saw the issue of pregnant women here and not having access to a clinic. I recently got a report of a pregnant woman, twenty one years old, was brought to a clinic by her father, was shot at one of the checkpoints. So the issue of security is extremely important and I am very pleased that the peace talks are now taking place.

**BAGNETTO:** I want to ask you about – there are twelve countries that were affected by this tsunami and you were able to visit some of them. I was wondering if there has been any dialogue between women...let's say in Somalia with women in Banda Aceh, or if there's going to be any sort of exchange maybe later on this year and what, if you are going to do something about that.

**HEYZER:** Actually we are bringing women from the tsunami affected countries to the Beijing + 10 meeting and there will be a panel which will allow the exchanges among some of the women in terms of identifying their priorities. So, this would be on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February. Equally important, whilst many organizations are talking about needs assessment and gender need assessment - what we are doing - and we learned this from Afghanistan and many other countries that we have been working with is that it is extremely important to get the local women to identify their own needs, their own priorities and their own solutions. So hopefully in May, we will be organizing – we as the United Nations Development Fund for Women – will be organizing a consultation of Aceh women, and eventually, a conference of women from the

tsunami affected countries. That we hope would be the women's agenda, or the perspective that can be put to donors as a next stage forward after the pledge appeal.

**WILLIAMS:** Let me ask you your predictions. What are the challenges for the next ten years?

**HEYER:** Well, I think because we are talking about 2005, the whole Millennium Development Goals is a big center of discussion. This is where the money will be going, it is a time-bound set of targets that has to be implemented and there is no way in which the Millennium Development Goals will be accomplished without looking at gender equality and women's empowerment. Whatever effective policy we have learned in terms of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action of CEDAW, has to be brought right and center to the Millennium Goals, so that is a challenge. We have to make sure that whatever resources we get, goes to the Millennium Development Goals, reach women.

**WILLIAMS:** So you're saying that the Beijing Platform and the Millennium Development Goals are not mutually exclusive?

**HEYZER** They are not at all exclusive because, I would say that the goals in fact becomes a new vehicle of making sure that gender equality gets implemented.

**WILLIAMS:** Thank you, thank you so much for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Noeleen Hayzer of the United Nations Development Fund for Women - UNIFEM. She was interviewed by Laura Angela Bagnetto of the Saudi Press Service and Susannah Price of the BBC. I'm Mary Alice Williams inviting you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

**ANNOUNCER:** Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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