

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO “BEIJING 2005: THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION  
OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN”  
Beijing, 29 August 2005

*Delivered by Ms. Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

The Fourth World Conference on Women was a milestone in international efforts to improve the status of women and achieve gender equality worldwide. Attracting the participation of almost 47, 000 women and men, the Beijing Conference and the parallel Huairou NGO Forum were, and remain, the largest-ever gatherings of government and NGO representatives at a United Nations conference.

One hundred and eighty-nine countries unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, recognizing gender equality and the empowerment of women as a key to development, peace and human rights. Designed as an agenda for women’s empowerment, the Platform emphasizes not only achieving equality and eliminating discrimination, but also the integration of women as full and equal partners. Indeed, Governments committed themselves to mainstream the gender perspective throughout all of their policies, planning and decision-making.

Ten years of experience since Beijing have yielded further advances. What were once called women’s issues have been transformed into matters of primary national and international significance. Stronger women’s networks and alliances have taken shape across issues and borders alike. And we understand, more than ever, that no single policy will ensure gender equality; rather, a comprehensive policy approach is needed. These insights will be of prime importance in tackling the remaining challenges to the achievement of gender equality.

Five years ago, world leaders in the Millennium Declaration recognized that gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Earlier this year, the Commission on the Status of Women recognized that women had made many gains: they have greater access to employment and decision-making, are better educated, and live longer. But they stressed that old challenges remain, such as discrimination and violence, and that troubling new challenges have emerged, such as the terrifying growth of HIV/AIDS among women, and the odious, increasingly common practice of trafficking of women and children. Let us not forget that women’s rights are human rights. Their full implementation at the national level is thus a legal obligation. Although that may seem, and should be, self-evident, it is a point we must continue to repeat as we move to strengthen the ability of the United Nations system to support national efforts to implement human rights, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

Next month, Heads of State and Government attending the 2005 World Summit at the United Nations in New York should not only reaffirm the role of women as equal partners in development, peace and decision-making, but also pledge their support to all efforts to bring about the changes to which national governments, international organizations and civil society committed themselves in Beijing ten years ago. And let us all redouble our efforts to turn those commitments into reality. At this commemorative meeting, you can help steer them in the right direction. I thank you all for your commitment, and wish you the best for the success of your discussions.