

# 4 The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China in 1995. This was the largest meeting of the Global Women's Movement, where 40,000 women traveled from all over the world to participate in this historic gathering. The presence of so many women activists was not only a testament to the growing political power of women but it also lent credibility to the event itself and helped ensure that the key outcome from the Conference, the Platform for Action, although negotiated among UN member States, reflected women's global concerns. The Beijing conference confirmed the important principle of free choice and the definition of health, given on the occasion of the Cairo Conference (see **Core Document 3**).

The Beijing Declaration recognized the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility (paragraph 17) which is one of the bases for their empowerment. It also affirmed the principle that equal access between men and women to reproductive and sexual health should be assured.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>

This is the **Declaration** made at the Beijing Conference, 1995. Paragraph 30 also makes direct reference to sexual and reproductive health. Although four references were made in the Draft Declaration to the term 'sexual orientation', they resulted in huge debate at the Conference, and were eventually deleted.

The PFA, (par.89) defines health as:

*A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

Full PFA text to be found here in separate files

**Reproductive health** implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so (see **Paragraph 94** of the Beijing Platform for Action for the full text).

**Reproductive rights** embrace certain human rights, such as the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children. And it includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence (again see **Paragraph 94**).

A whole chapter of the Beijing Program for Action focuses on **Women and Health**. Taking into account the fact that half of all adults infected with HIV/AIDS are women, **gender inequalities** between men and women are considered as obstacles to safe sex. It follows that tackling gender inequalities is a key strategy to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmissible diseases.

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Strategic objective C3 deals with gender sensitive initiatives in the field of HIV/AIDS:

***Gender sensitive initiatives should be undertaken in order to address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues.***

The PFA identifies actions (see **Paragraph 108** of the Beijing Platform for Action) to be taken by governments, international organisations, NGOs, health professionals, pharmaceutical industries and the mass media to achieve the strategic objective C3. The need to involve women, especially those who are infected, in the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies on HIV/AIDS is stressed (action **a** related to objective C3). The national capacities to implement gender-sensitive programs and policies on HIV/AIDS have to be strengthened (action **g**). Furthermore, the importance of delivering information and providing education on HIV/AIDS to both women and men is recognized (actions **i** and **l**). Access to affordable and appropriate preventive services with respect to STIs, including HIV/AIDS, should be assured to everyone (action **m**). Gender oriented health programmes must be designed and implemented to assure access to health services for women and girls, and to tackle serious concerns, such as maternal mortality, whose reduction is one of the Millennium Development Goals.

***The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)***, a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council and the UN General Assembly, reviewed and appraised the Beijing Declaration and Program for Action in 2000 and 2005. On these occasions the emergency of the HIV/AIDS contamination was stressed. The CSW stated in its 49th session in 2005 that the devastating scale and the impact of HIV/AIDS required urgent action at all levels. Gender equality is seen as a key factor in the reduction of the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS.