

The 3rd East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting

Seoul Joint Ministerial Communique

Preamble

1. We, the Ministers and other representatives of the national institutions in charge of gender equality issues for 11 East Asian countries, 3 observers as well as 2 international organizations, hereby convened to hold the 3rd East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Seoul on June 24-26, 2009. Recognizing that this opportunity represents continuing efforts of each country and the region towards significant progress in gender equality, peace and sustainable development, we adopt the following as the shared view of all participants of the meeting and call for strengthened commitments, partnership and more concrete actions to achieve our goals.

Responding to International Commitments

2. We reaffirm our commitments to end discrimination against women and create gender equality enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and agreed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We also reaffirm that deliberate efforts to address gender gaps and inequalities in each of the Millennium Development Goals are essential. We welcome the OECD DAC initiatives to integrate gender perspectives into development co-operation processes, and the 'MDG3 Global Call to Action' to increase international support and investments in the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

3. Each country in East Asia and the regional network have made progress in creating the institutional framework and implementing policies to promote and achieve the goal of gender equality. However, despite the pride and a sense of accomplishment we share, challenges lie ahead of us, which threaten the everyday lives and human rights of women and girls. Added to the existing difficulties is the convergence of the current global economic crisis and rapid environmental degradation.

4. Global and regional commitments can make significant differences in the quality of life of women and men only if they are translated into concrete actions. Particularly emphasizing this point, this Meeting provided us with an invaluable opportunity to discuss common challenges, good strategies, and directions for future cooperation and partnership.

Assessment: Convergence of Economic Crisis and Environmental Degradation

Global Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Women

5. The economies of the states we represent are now at the center of world economic growth, and the pace of globalization is accelerating in the region. Globalization may offer new opportunities and boost economic growth, but also has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities and gaps. Despite the resiliency of the Asian economies, many individuals and organizations have been hit hard by recent financial turmoil, and its impact may have longer-term consequences.

6. As observed, the 1997 Asian financial crisis had major impacts on women and girls who had been exposed to greater vulnerabilities. The economic crisis exacerbated the problems, from which women had been suffered and, in turn, worsened the state of feminization of poverty and violence against women. To prevent violence against women, including trafficking in women and children, there is a need to step up the provision of better access to economic opportunities for women. It is important for East Asian countries to cooperate and coordinate regionally as well as globally in anti-trafficking in persons towards consolidating global efforts on monitoring, evaluation and reporting of convicted traffickers to attain strong and effective global cooperation.

7. Balance between work and family responsibilities tends to be given little attention when there is an economic crisis. Good balance between work and family is essential for women to cope with both their family responsibilities and economic activities, as well as to share care work with men, especially in times of economic crisis, when women or their family members may be displaced from gainful employment.

Gender Dimensions of Environmental Issues

8. East Asian countries are also affected by natural disasters often associated with climate changes. For instance, the Tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004 showed that natural disasters present gender specific challenges. During and after natural disasters, single women and women-headed households are worse off in their ability to meet their basic needs. Women experience an expansion of household responsibilities and increased stress after disasters as they face challenges of providing shelter, food, water, and care for their families. It is recognized that during and after natural disasters women and girls are often at the increased risk of violence, such as rape and trafficking, which should be given specific intervention.

9. The Global Green New Deal promoted by the UN is expected to include public work programmes, support for systems of social protection especially in developing countries, and mechanisms to protect the assets of ordinary people and encourage productive investment. However, only limited information is available about the gender dimensions of eco-friendly initiatives, which calls for more attention to the fact that women could be excluded from new jobs, business opportunities and funds allocated in green technology sectors. Careful attention also should be paid to health issues of women and children in thinking about environmental issues. Women and children could be more vulnerable to environmental deterioration, including air pollution, soil pollution and the use of agricultural chemicals, which can negatively affect their health.

Towards More Sustainable and Inclusive Development

Sustainable Development through Green Growth

10. There is a growing consensus that the daunting environmental issues could be turned into an opportunity to address policy gaps and reorient the development paradigm. The Global Green New Deal will be a part of the broader counter-cyclical responses to the crisis and comprise financial support to developing countries to prevent contraction of their economies. It will also include the national stimulus packages in both developed and developing countries aiming at reviving and greening national economies. Recognizing the significance of the Global Green New Deal, women of the Asian region will cooperate in its various projects.

11. We will ensure that women have better access to information about green growth and new economic opportunities generated by the investments in the green industry. In order to

integrate a gender perspective in the area of untapped potentials related to developing more practical and affordable climate-friendly technologies and renewable energy, women technicians and scientists should be given more opportunities to participate in eco-friendly research and development projects.

12. Women should be encouraged to participate in the green economy. As green consumers, women can exercise environmental protection within daily lives. Also as advocates and producers of green growth, women can influence and transform the decision-making processes of the production, marketing and distribution of chemical-free goods, towards reducing carbon dependency, with a view to protecting ecosystems and preserving natural resources. More women entrepreneurs should be encouraged to enter all sectors of green industry as well. We will ensure that women become equal partners and beneficiaries of the green economy with men.

Inclusive Digital Economy

13. Faced with the fast-evolving information and communication technologies of the 21st century, we reaffirm that technology is an essential tool for women's empowerment. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) presents numerous potentials for women, in terms of access to knowledge, education and economic resources. We will continue to address the gender disparities in ICT development and training.

14. ICT and e-business capacity building for women are crucial for increasing women's roles and participation in the digital economy. Policy-makers, e-business experts and entrepreneurs will continue to share information and strategies for creating a more gender-sensitive digital economy. More resources need to be allocated to reduce the digital divide between women and men, and to provide women and girls with better access to the latest technologies.

Governance and Promotion of Women's Participation and Leadership

15. We call for the establishment of mechanisms to promote women's full participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels. Greater access by women and girls to education, knowledge, and opportunities is a prerequisite for progress in human resource development. We will continue to monitor the gender aspects of the achievement of MDGs, not just in the educational targets in Goal 3, but across all MDGs. In addition, temporary special measures

for women such as numerical goals with concrete timeframes and quota system are necessary to accelerate women's equal participation in governance.

16. By monitoring the changes in the Gender Empowerment Measures, we will work together to remove barriers to women's equal participation in decision making in the legislature, judiciary, administration, executive, private sector and community. More leadership training programs will be offered to women in all sectors.

Social Protection for Women's Safety and Health

17. Recognition of women's human rights is a prerequisite to achieve gender equality and the advancement of women. Stronger initiatives are needed to respond to the increasing safety and health problems in the region such as trafficking in women and children, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, natural disasters and human and animal diseases, which have negatively affected the lives of women and children. The participation of men and boys is also needed to end violence against women and children.

18. We welcome the UN Secretary-General's campaign, *UNite to End Violence against Women*, aimed at accelerating efforts to address the problem of violence against women. We will cooperate with the UN system to share information about existing and planned strategies, programmes and activities on violence against women. We will learn from each other about more effective interventions and ways to reduce the gap between de jure and de facto equality.

19. More effective and sustainable social safety net is needed to address feminization of poverty, to protect women from economic downturn and poor health. More cooperation for research and program development for gender-sensitive approaches in the areas of disaster relief, basic livelihood protection, income support, health insurances and social services is called for.

Strategic Partnership for Gender Equality

Collaborations for Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives

20. After a decade's efforts in laying the foundation for gender mainstreaming practice, we call for stronger commitment, more systematic approach of political leaders and gender advocates, more active partnership among stakeholders, and continued capacity building in

the policy-making process. Apart from the national machineries and legal measures for gender equality, adequate financial and human resources are equally important to realize this goal.

21. Government and non-governmental institutions are encouraged to utilize the technical tools of gender mainstreaming strategy such as gender analysis, gender statistics, gender budgeting and gender training in order to integrate women's human rights and gender concerns into their policies and programmes. As has been emphasized before, sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are essential for gender mainstreaming. We will share experiences in production and usage of gender statistics, gender training, gender impact assessments, gender budgeting initiatives, and best practices in the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies.

Networking for Capacity Building, Evaluation and Feedback

22. The member states of the East Asian Region are called upon to exert more concrete efforts to take strategic actions in future collaborations. We are dedicated to ensuring that our partnership will reverse the negative consequences of economic crisis and environmental degradation into positive and fruitful opportunities that could enhance the quality of life for women and girls in the region.

23. We will continue to cooperate in networking and collaborating with civil society organizations and development partners in capacity-building projects that respond to gender equality. We will pay more attention to the policy processes, evaluation and feedback mechanism within each country to ensure more effective and efficient integration of the gender perspective in all policy areas including the ODA. We will work together in advancing the status of women in the region, with attention paid to the diversity of the context of each nation.

Closing

24. This Meeting is a renewed beginning of our collective endeavors. As we face the common challenges posed by recent economic crisis and environmental deterioration, we hereby pledge to further reinforce our partnership and collaboration for advocating gender-sensitive approaches in all policy areas in order to enhance gender equality and sustainable

development in the region.

25. We reiterate that strong political will and leadership are essential for more concrete performances and achievements of our shared goals. As national machineries for gender equality and women's empowerment, we continue to take leadership and call for the same political will and leadership across the board.

26. Encouraged by the success of the 3rd East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea and chaired by its Minister of Gender Equality, we resolve to continue the Ministerial Meeting process on a biennial basis.

27. We greatly appreciate the Kingdom of Cambodia for proposing to host the 4th East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting in 2011.