

The East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting TOKYO JOINT MINISTERIAL COMMUNIQUE

Preamble

1. We, the Ministers and other representatives of national institutions in charge of gender issues of 16 East Asian countries, as well as 2 international organizations, hereby convened in Tokyo on 30 June and 1 July 2006 to hold the first region-wide Ministerial Meeting on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Recognizing that this opportunity marks a historic step towards major progress in gender equality, peace and development in this region, we affirm the following as the shared view of all participants of the meeting.

Responding to International Commitments

2. In September 2000, Leaders from 189 countries adopted the Millennium Declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit, which includes key development objectives. These objectives were embodied as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

3. Among these objectives, Goal 3 focuses on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. While gender equality is a goal in itself, it is also a key to achieve all the eight MDGs. This notion was recently articulated at the World Summit held in New York in September 2005, which reaffirmed that “progress for women is progress for all.” Without deliberate efforts to address gender gaps and inequalities in each MDG, none of them would be achieved in a sustainable and equitable manner.

4. Referring back further, the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 provided a concrete action plan to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. While remarkable progress has been made in some areas, particularly in the creation of a positive normative framework for gender equality at all levels, still there is a long way ahead of us, as was reiterated most recently at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in New York in March 2005.

5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also provides for women’s equal enjoyment with men of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW requires strong political will and leadership, strategic partnerships, innovative thinking, and adequate resources.

6. These global commitments can make a real improvement in the lives of women and men around the world, only if they are translated into concrete national action. Particularly emphasizing this point, this Meeting provided us with an invaluable opportunity to discuss common challenges, good practices and experiences, and the way forward.

Common Challenges in East Asia

7. We share both cultural and traditional commonalities on many fronts. Our countries traditionally value harmony and partnerships – partnerships between women and men as well as among our nations. Such partnerships are the driving force for making progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality and for bringing social transformation. In the process, it is important for us to continue to uphold our own positive values and principles.

Globalization

8. The economies of the nations 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 it has the potential to also exacerbate existing inequalities and gaps, especially those based on race, income, ethnicity, and gender.

9. We recognize the feminization of poverty and the increasing migration of women. While migration yields economic benefits for both sending and host countries, migrant women remain vulnerable. We call for deliberate efforts to mitigate the negative impact of globalization on women and to maximize its potential for economic and social empowerment, particularly for those who reside in rural areas.

Work-life Balance and Unpaid Work

10. Many women in our region are struggling to strike a good work-life balance. They are facing traditional gender roles and gender-based division of labor. Women not only play an active role in productive work and contribute to the national economy but they also provide 70% of unpaid work, which consists of time spent on activities providing care for family and community members. Exclusion, overwork and the burden of care often limit women's access to capacity and capability development as well as their participation in social and political spheres, putting them in even more vulnerable positions.

11. We thus continue our efforts for changing stereo-typical gender roles and socialization patterns, addressing burdens of unpaid work, and promoting work-life

balance and sharing responsibilities. We believe that such efforts will lead to improving the quality of life of both women and men.

Women's Human Rights and Participation in Decision-making

12. Recognition of women's human rights, the promotion of their participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels and equal partnership between women and men are prerequisite to achieve gender equality and the advancement of women. We all need to make our concerted efforts, not only to benefit women but also to build a society that is equitable and sustainable. Gender equality and women's empowerment involve changing power relations at all levels- individual, collective and institutional- and requires public awareness.

Emerging Issues

13. We also recognize emerging 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 impacted on people's lives, especially those of women and children.

Concrete Action towards Gender Equality

Strengthening National Machineries for Women and Gender

14. Gender inequality and pervasive gender discrimination cannot be reversed by a handful of promising practices and successes. National women and gender machineries are the vehicle for gender mainstreaming at the national level. We need to ensure that we have specific policies on gender mainstreaming and continue to strengthen institutional capacities of the machineries and allocate adequate resources. We also reaffirm our commitment to taking leadership in making real progress in gender mainstreaming enhanced by a rights-based and results-based approach.

Promoting Women's Participation and Leadership

15. We call for the establishment of adequate and efficient legal and institutional frameworks and mechanisms to protect women's human rights and 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. Introduction of numerical targets, positive action, and specific indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, for monitoring progress may accelerate efforts for narrowing gender gaps in political, economic, and social spheres.

Building Capacities for Gender Statistics, Gender Analysis, and Gender Sensitive Budgeting

16. Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are essential to identify disparities and needs of women and men. Further work is necessary to improve the availability of sex-disaggregated data, build capacities for gender statistics and analysis, and integrate findings into policies, plans, and resource allocations as well as in economic and social policies.

17. It is particularly important to develop methodologies to quantify women's unpaid work in order to better assess and measure the contribution of women to society. We commit to addressing the needs of particularly vulnerable and under-represented women. Countries that have advanced statistical systems and statistical offices are encouraged to share experience, expertise, and information.

18. Gender analysis and gender sensitive budgeting are examples of tools that allow the consideration of gender perspectives into macro-economic and micro-economic frameworks. These tools aim to further enhance gender equality as well as to ensure strategic use of limited public resources. They are also tools for good governance, helping to ensure that women have a voice in the governmental decisions.

19. Experience and good practices in this area should be collected and shared. Developing more systematic and comprehensive sex-disaggregated data for measuring progress for women and conducting surveys with a view to quantifying women's unpaid work are a means of better assessing and measuring the contribution of women to society.

Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

20. Collaboration and dialogue between government and civil society organizations (CSOs), including the private sector, help to identify the needs and priorities of women and men at the grass-root level, which is critical in translating global commitments into national actions. CSOs play an important role in supplementing and complementing the functions of national machineries. We encourage private sector entities to practice corporate social responsibility by promoting gender equality in their own organizations.

Addressing Region-wide Emerging Issues

21. We are observing emerging issues that require regional cooperation and bilateral agreements. Such problems include human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and

natural disasters. They can be best addressed in a collective way at the regional level. We will therefore collaborate closely through the sharing of information, advocacy and concrete actions.

Closing

22. This Meeting is the beginning of our collective endeavors. We hereby pledge to further reinforce our partnership and collaboration for gender equality and women's empowerment in this region. We shall form a regional network for sharing good practices and lessons-learned to strengthen our efforts. We are dedicated to ensuring that our partnership itself becomes an example of good practice that can be replicated in other regions and presented to the international community.

23. We reiterate that strong political will and leadership are essential. As national champions for gender equality and the empowerment of women, we continue to take leadership and we call for political will and leadership across the board.

24. Encouraged by the success of the East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting, hosted by the Government of Japan and chaired by its Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs, we resolve to continue the Ministerial Meeting process on an annual basis.

25. We welcome the willingness of the Government of India to host the Second Ministerial Meeting in 2007 and of the Government of Republic of Korea to host the Third Ministerial Meeting in 2008. The respective Governments are expected to communicate with the Secretariat of the First Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo.