

# CommonConcern

A PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD YWCA



**FEATURE:**  
**BEYOND BEIJING**

**YOUNG WOMEN ON THE MOVE:**

**Viewpoint:** The most critical area of concern for young women for the next 15 years

**HIV AND AIDS:**

**Young People versus HIV and AIDS:**  
A Comprehensive Approach



World YWCA

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#### ON THE COVER:

**Paola Salwan**, World YWCA Programme Assistant for Europe, Africa and the Middle East

# Editorial

## Reigniting the Spirit of Beijing

**“Beijing was celebration, protest, discovery, dialogue, commitment and action”**



**Susan Brennan**  
World YWCA President

**B**eijing, China 1995. I still remember the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. More than a conference, Beijing was celebration, protest, discovery, dialogue, commitment and action. In Beijing, I encountered the YWCA as a worldwide women’s movement, experienced the diversity of international feminism, confronted the controversy surrounding women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, chanted “Women’s rights are human rights” with women from around the world, lobbied governments to recognise that violence against women is a human rights issue and witnessed women’s leadership on the global stage. For me, as a young woman representing the YWCA of Australia, Beijing was life-changing.

Fifteen years later, the Beijing Platform for Action still charts the main route to women’s empowerment worldwide. It is a road map that has guided the work of YWCAs around the globe. As we participate in the 54th Commission on the Status of Women where the international community will assess its progress implementing the Platform, the YWCA delegation will advocate for new pathways on women and health, specifically sexual

and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS; violence against women and women in power and decision-making. The World YWCA will call on the international community to accelerate towards our destination of women’s empowerment.

In this edition of *Common Concern*, three former World YWCA leaders reflect on how the World YWCA both influenced and was impacted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. World YWCA General Secretary Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda offers directions to achieve equality, development and peace before the next 15-year milestone.

We are honoured to have Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General and Special Envoy for HIV and AIDS in Asia, Dr. Nafis Sadik outline future interventions needed by governments and civil society to ensure universal access, especially for women and young women, in our HIV and AIDS section.

This issue highlights the work of YWCAs following the Beijing Platform for Action to achieve women’s empowerment, including the YWCA of Guyana’s work in education, the YWCA of Liberia’s dynamic programme for former women soldiers

and the initiative of the YWCA of Korea to economically and socially empower married migrant women.

In *Take Action*, World YWCA Board member and Deputy Mayor of Tampere, Finland Ana Kaisa Ikonen writes frankly about overcoming obstacles to women’s participation in politics and YWCA Canada shares its “Beyond Shelter” programme and the essential changes in public policy required to ensure women are free from violence.

Honouring our distinctive intergenerational approach, in the *Leading Change* section, YWCA women leaders of all ages speak out about what they see as the most urgent issues in the Beijing Platform for Action, what has been achieved, and what still needs to be done. In *Young Women on the Move*, younger YWCA leaders share their critical concern for young women in the coming 15 years.

It is vital that the international community recapture the spirit of optimism, which energised the mass gathering at Beijing in 1995. Together we must grasp the life-changing possibility that the empowerment of women around the world is within our reach, just around the next corner. ■

# YWCA's Around the World

2010 marks the 15th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women. The fourth in a series of World Conferences for Women, the conference defined a clear direction for women's advancement by adopting the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and many YWCAs have since worked to promote the BPFA in their communities.

## YWCA OF LIBERIA COMBINES PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING WITH VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR EX-SOLDIERS



The Platform for Action listed Armed Conflict as a 'Critical Area of Concern'. The YWCA of Liberia provides safe spaces for women and girls associated with fighting forces.

**D**uring the armed conflicts in Liberia, women and children were the most marginalised and vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuses, violence and torture. Some were even kept as sex slaves. The YWCA of Liberia's vocational skills training programme integrates psychosocial counselling to help rehabilitate these girls and aid their reintegration back into their various communities.

Between 2006-2009, the YWCA trained 525 war affected younger women and girls associated with fighting forces: 277 were young women or girls, 200 were adult women.

In interacting with these girls, the YWCA counsellors were able to get firsthand information about their experiences. To increase their gender sensitivity and facilitate reintegration upon return to their communities, men and boys were also included in the programme.

As well as sports and other recreational activities, the

programme's health components included HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment. A total of 48 young women and girls in the programme were HIV positive.

The YWCA concentrated its work in six counties that have high numbers of girls out of school as well as suitable commercial activities. These were Nimba, Bong, Bomi, Montserrado, Grand Bassa, and Margibi. Vocational skills choices included auto mechanics, brakes making, pastry making, and agro-processing. The programme was funded by the United Nations Development Programme.

## YWCA OF GUYANA MAKES GIRLS EDUCATION A PRIORITY

**W**ith over 60 years of achievement in providing girls with vocational training, the YWCA has demonstrated the power of the old adage that when you educate a girl, you educate a nation.

The YWCA of Guyana's programme to educate girls has not only helped the girls to gain productive skills, it has contributed to poverty reduction and placed the issue back onto the government agenda.



The YWCA of Guyana ensures education for women and girls is kept on the agenda



The YWCA of Korea offers migrant women financial education and vocational training to build better lives and stronger communities.

YWCA of Guyana General Secretary Glynis Alonzo-Beaton explains: "It's important we address the issue of women and education in Guyana as over the years women and girls were never on the agenda of those in authority. With the YWCA constantly keeping education a priority, it slowly caught on and crept back on the agenda of those in decision-making positions."

Offered to girls 14 to 18 years old who dropped out of the traditional education system, the two-year programme provides an opportunity to learn skills and gain economic independence. Over 70 students participate annually, usually in rural areas and the course has included HIV positive girls.

The programme has had an "amazing impact" on the lives of young women participants and has "changed many lives." Alonzo-Beaton says that, "More than 95% of young women who completed the course have gained a skill and become productive. If they did not have this opportunity, they would have remained uneducated and unemployed, increasing the poverty in Guyana."

The training includes design, entry-level administration, cosmetology, plumbing, dancing and life skills with sexual and reproductive health education and physical education.

### **YWCA OF KOREA: JOB TRAINING HELPS MIGRANT WOMEN BUILD NEW LIVES**

**S**ingle women who migrate to Korea generally come for employment opportunities. However, married women are often "trailing spouses" following their husband's career path. They may

arrive in Korea without any job experience or their own life plan. Therefore, economic empowerment of married migrant women through job training is one of the YWCA of Korea's main priorities.

According to recent statistics, there are approximately 128,000 married migrant women in Korea. The YWCA of Korea, supported by Lotte Homeshopping, offers them financial education and vocational training. Research identified potential vocations for migrant women: clothes mender, nail artist, counsellor, folk artist, barista, multicultural education instructor, English instructor, hair stylist were selected as vocations.

The women also receive career information and an employment fair was held for them. The Ministry of Gender Equality provided women who had finished the training programme with a job practicum in a social enterprise industry or local YWCA cooperative.

The programme requires basic Korean language skills which means some of the newer migrants may need to participate in the YWCA of Korea's language study courses first. The programme is advertised both through these courses and by local newspapers and broadcasters, flyers, banners, etc. In 2009, 109 women participated.

The YWCA of Korea plans to extend this project to enhance the social participation of married migrant women and raise their status and self-confidence through economic empowerment.

# Feature

# BEYOND BEIJING

## Then and Now—Recollections and Lessons from Beijing and Beyond

Common Concern asked three World YWCA leaders who attended the UN's Fourth World Conference for Women and NGO Forum about their experiences and the lessons it held for our movement and for women's activism. Anita Andersson (AA) was World President from 1995-1999 and led the World YWCA delegation, Elaine Hesse Steel (EHS) was World YWCA General Secretary from 1987-1998 and Doreen Boyd (DB) was Deputy General Secretary from 1991-1996.



**Anita Andersson**  
World YWCA President 1995-1999



**Elaine Hesse Steel**  
World YWCA General Secretary 1987-1998



**Doreen Boyd**  
World YWCA Deputy Secretary 1991-1996

**The World YWCA has a legacy of leadership in representing women's views at the international level. When did this begin?**

**EHS:** The YWCA movement has never been an isolated NGO [non-governmental organisation] working on its own. Its role as the only women's organisation of the three recognised NGOs at the founding of the League of Nations, predecessor to the United Nations, is testimony to the prominence it had within the international community even in 1919, only 15 years after its founding in 1894. YWCA women today can take pride

in our inheritance from 155 years of women activists ...our "godmothers". This legacy of determined leadership continued through the decades as the World YWCA represented women's perspectives to governments and at the UN and its agencies.

**The 1995 World YWCA Council and first International Women's Summit met only seven weeks before the Beijing Women's Conference. How were they linked?**

**AA:** The Executive Committee thought they should have some connection since the two events were

so close together. We decided to host an International Women's Summit (IWS) just prior to the World Council—the first IWS. We invited women from other organisations to start a dialogue that would continue in China. The Women's World Agenda emerged from that and we called it "a new agenda for the YWCA". The IWS was also the culminating event of the World YWCA's 100th anniversary celebration that had begun in 1994. The Women's World Agenda was a good advocacy tool for us, although we were working on so many issues that it was difficult to emphasise one. The World YWCA's concentration on HIV and AIDS has given us more of a focus.

## What was the impact of the Beijing Conference on the global agenda and the World YWCA movement?

**EHS:** What differentiated the Fourth World Conference on Women from the previous three was its place in a series of major UN conferences in the 1990s that debated solutions to global problems and educated world opinion. Each conference repeatedly identified gender inequities as a major contributor to global problems; there was simply no questioning the legitimacy of what was said when we got to Beijing.

Within our movement, these conferences resulted in a less competitive attitude amongst NGOs. We began to take a more integrated approach to working with other NGOs since Beijing and the other major UN conferences had parallel NGO forums.

We also became aware of the need to focus our work within chosen issues. A greater understanding began of regionalism in a broader context, although it still required several years not to be seen as "another layer".

Finally, the conferences resulted in universal acceptance of the right of women's groups to monitor their governments' actions and initial demands to monitor private enterprise.

## How did the World YWCA influence the UN Women's Conferences?

**AA:** The conferences had a big impact on the women's movement and influenced the World YWCA's work but the World YWCA also influenced the women's conferences, especially the first three when World YWCA leaders chaired the NGO Forums. By 1995, many YWCA women were part of official government delegations. The YWCA was and is very strong because we have both a grassroots constituency and connections to the UN and its agencies. The YWCA's presence in both the NGO Forum and the UN conference was important for lobbying for our priority issues. We collaborated with other women's organisations and many of the YWCA team had good access to and relationships with their

government delegates. Those who did not learned from those who did and tried to establish contact. We did this well, although we probably could have done even better.

## How has the role and participation of young women evolved?

**AA:** In Beijing, they talked about women, the girl child, and youth, but didn't recognise the separate needs of young women. This was very frustrating—it made them seem anonymous. Now there is much more consciousness of young women as a group with distinct needs.

**EHS:** In the YWCA, the Beijing conference and the UN conferences of the 1990s led to an acceptance that the YWCA would often be represented by a large contingent of young women rather than "established leadership". There were several pre-conferences for young people organised by UNICEF, the World Health Organisation or youth NGOs, with the World YWCA a major partner represented by our young women leaders.

## What has improved since the 1995 Beijing Conference?

**AA:** Many things have improved. If you look back to the first women's conference in 1975, NGOs had to struggle to be admitted to the UN meeting. Now the UN and most nations count on support from NGOs and women's organisations when they discuss equality and the situation of women. And now there are many, many NGOs.

Also, in 1995, we were able to discuss sexual rights and sexual orientation but it was very controversial and not much came out in the final document. Now in both industrialised and developing countries, there is much more open dialogue.

**DB:** I see improvement in many areas such as representation in the political arena with women holding significant positions of power and influence in different parts of the world.

## Which critical concerns in the BPFA have not improved?

**DB:** What has not changed significantly is the problem of violence against women (VAW), especially domestic violence. This is a global issue. Laws and policies have been enacted and conventions ratified by governments but they are largely not implemented. One positive development is that the current UN Secretary General has made this his issue and come out with a strong campaign against it<sup>1</sup>. Also, the United Nations General Assembly voted in September to merge the four UN agencies working on women's issues into a UN super agency for gender affairs, which hopefully should result in a stronger global response to VAW.

## What current critical concerns were not identified among the 12 in the BPFA?

**DB:** Fifteen years ago, how HIV and AIDS would impact women was not known. HIV and AIDS had been associated with intravenous drug use and homosexuality. As the epidemic evolved the substantial social and psychological components became evident. No one could have imagined that women would be so vulnerable to sexual transmission. They are affected disproportionately because of their marginalisation, their poverty, and their vulnerability and powerlessness to protect themselves in the context of intimate sexual relationships. Many programmes for women have taught them to be assertive and "negotiate safe sex" but our thinking has evolved to understand that safe sex is not negotiable, it is a given. ■

**Elaine Hesse Steel's comments were extracted from her article on "The Impact of the UN Conferences and Emerging Issues." Anita Andersson and Doreen Boyd were interviewed by Muna Kaldawi-Killingback. To read Elaine's full article or the complete interviews with Anita and Doreen, please go to:**

[www.worldywca.org/events/CSW2010](http://www.worldywca.org/events/CSW2010)

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign see: [endviolence.un.org/](http://endviolence.un.org/)

# Accelerating Women's Empowerment:

## Approaches for the next 15 years

**W**omen and girls in the YWCA movement have always taken a pragmatic approach to women's empowerment and change in social relations and behaviours. This movement can legitimately claim its place as a matriarch of the women's struggle for equality, justice, human dignity, peace and care for the environment. Women and girls in the YWCA have been at the centre of serving communities and advocating for policies and global systems that place women's leadership and gender equality at their core.

Across the world, the YWCAs' young women's leadership and mentorship programmes and education, development, and child care initiatives as well as fitness and well-being programmes continue to provide women with choices and options, building their capacity to make personal decisions and have their voices heard.

In 1995, the World YWCA was among the many voices that identified, defined and stated the twelve critical concerns related to empowerment of women and fulfilment of their potential to work for world peace and development. The Beijing Platform for Action framed the global agenda for women, complementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Five years later, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325/2000, that defined the core elements of the women, peace and security agenda. In 2009, the General Assembly passed a resolution establishing a comprehensive UN entity on gender.

However, women throughout the world continue to experience discrimination, abuse and lower status despite the existence of many laws, policies and statements by decision-makers. Going into the future, what is challenging, exciting, innovative that can give us hope? To achieve women's empowerment and gender equality, the next decade must be shaped by significant shifts in approach and strategy.

First, a strong and practical **rights-based approach** needs to be supported by adequate budgets, quality services, and skilled workers. At the intersection of Beijing's critical areas of concern, this approach reaffirms the interdependence of rights but these will only become a reality when we work together to hold our governments, families, churches and communities accountable.

The World YWCA also advocates **comprehensive prevention approaches**. A well planned, resourced community level intervention like supporting girls' education can reduce the risk of women and girls experiencing violence, contracting HIV, dying in childbirth or dropping out of school.

**Investment in women and girls** continues to be at the centre of empowerment, building self-sustaining families and communities. The adage that if you educate a girl you educate a nation must be implemented in its literal sense. The next decade must focus on education, training, and technology and knowledge management with more leadership opportunities for women and girls, and an intergenerational approach built on positive cultural values and traditions. This will unleash the potential of girls and women both as individuals and collectively.

Another precondition for empowerment is **safety and security** for women and girls. The future demands accountability and imagination to create safe and secure spaces for women and girls that guarantee a life free of violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, human trafficking, sexual slavery and other forms of abuse. It embraces the notion that women and girls must enjoy their homes, schools, places of worship, their cities, and their communities. Survivors of violence and women and girls living with HIV must have full access to service, information, and freedom to live their lives without stigma or discrimination. Governments must be held accountable for enforcing laws that protect women from violence and ensuring provision of social and health care services including psychosocial counselling services.

We hope that when we look back at this decade, we will be able to claim significant progress in the empowerment of women and girls. ■



**Nyaradzayi  
Gumbonzvanda**

**World YWCA General Secretary**

# The Beijing Platform for Action An Agenda for Women's Empowerment

The Fourth World Conference on Women was convened by the United Nations in 1995 in Beijing, China. The aim of the conference was to assess progress since the Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985 and to adopt a platform for action, concentrating on key issues identified as obstacles to the advancement of women in the world.

**Governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organisations and the private sector, are called upon to take strategic action in the following critical areas of concern\*:**

1. The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
2. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
3. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
4. Violence against women
5. The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
6. Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
7. Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
8. Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
9. Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
10. Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
11. Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
12. Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

(\*From Article 46 of the BPFA 1995)

## The World YWCA at the UN:

World YWCA Leadership at NGO Forums at the UN Women's Conferences during the UN Decade for Women and beyond (1975-1995):

- **World YWCA Lead Representative to the UN Mildred Persinger chairs the NGO Tribune that ran parallel to the 1975 International Women's Conference in Mexico City. 114 NGOs register for the NGO Forum; 6,000 participants.**
- **World YWCA General Secretary Elizabeth Palmer chairs the NGO Forum at the 1980 Copenhagen Mid-Decade Conference. 134 NGOs; 7,200 participants.**
- **World YWCA President Dame Nita Barrow chairs the NGO Forum at the 1985 Nairobi End-of-Decade Conference. 163 NGOs; 13,500 participants**
- **At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the World YWCA has a delegation of 17 women; five of whom are accredited to the official UN conference. More than 300 women from YWCAs worldwide attend the NGO Forum. 2,000 NGOs; 31,000 participants.**

# Take Action

# Overcoming

# Barriers to Better

# Gender Representation in Politics

Anna-Kaisa Ikonen is Deputy Mayor of the City of Tampere, Finland and a Vice President of the World YWCA. She learned leadership through her lifelong involvement in the YWCA. Here she outlines strategies to overcome obstacles to women's equal participation in decision-making.



**Anna-Kaisa Ikonen**

**World YWCA Vice President**

**Deputy Mayor of the the City of Tampere, Finland**

## BREAKING BARRIERS AND STEREOTYPES

**W**hen we discuss women in leadership, we often focus on conflicts between career and family commitments. Women tend to have a bad conscience about not giving enough time to their families. This can be a barrier when women, especially young women, think of taking on leadership positions in work or politics.

When struggling with caring responsibilities, women need to be supported by close networks: husbands/partners, family and friends. Society needs to support women by offering childcare through the state, municipality, or non-governmental organisations. This allows women to participate in public life.

We must also pay attention not only to the top leadership but to the whole path that leads us there. We need education as well as skills to campaign, communicate and negotiate. Opportunities to participate in decision-making at the grassroots level allow women to grow into more challenging posts. I myself

started as a three-year-old girl in a YWCA club, later becoming a club leader and then ending up on the local board, going from there to the YWCA national board and presidency and finally serving on the World Board and as one of the World YWCA Vice Presidents. I believe there are many of us who can tell the same fine story of how our leadership has grown within this movement and beyond.

It's also about how we act as individuals. Women face many expectations. It is good not to be either too serious or too frivolous. The media still pays a lot more attention to the way women dress than men so it's important to pay attention to how you look too. But these are just secondary means — cheap publicity never gets you far. To be reliable in the long run we need to be clever, do the work, and gain the required knowledge.

Age is a difficult question. There never seems to be a proper age for a woman. You are either too young, potentially a busy mother laden with responsibilities, or simply too old. As women it is our responsibility to overturn these generalisations by acting against them.

When we get older we should give room and opportunities to those who are younger. Even without a lot of experience, they can bring fresh thinking. We may also innovate ways to combine work and family so having a baby won't become a barrier to our careers in our own heads and in societal practices. We can strengthen the positions of older women by respecting their knowledge and learning from them as mentors.

### SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Too often women are merciless to other women and when they get to a position of leadership, they strive to treat women and men absolutely equally, trying to avoid the stigma associated with feminism. Still, equality is not always enough. Women need affirmative action too, making use of relationships and women's networks – just as men have always done.

The demands of women's movements for equality have helped break through masculine traditions. And, while they are not the best means, quotas ensure women are represented. None of us can do it alone. When we enter leadership positions, we must remember to open doors to other women.

In the end it's about our own attitudes. We must believe in ourselves and have self-confidence and determination. We can lift up other women by giving them responsibilities, by employing them and giving them leadership positions, and finally, by voting for women in elections. It is only in this way that we will see women's leadership grow. It is in our own hands. ■

## Holistic Policies Empower Women Fleeing Violence

For more than 30 years, advocates in Canada have worked to develop services for women fleeing violence. Ann Decter, YWCA Canada's Director of Advocacy and Public Policy explains how government policies can protect women.

As the nation's largest single provider of shelter services, YWCA Canada initiated the "Beyond Shelter Walls" project to research policies and programmes that ensure women leaving shelter have safe options rather than facing a choice between poverty and a return to abuse.

Our system of violence against women (VAW) shelters offers safety and support to 100,000 women and children annually. Shelters are the first and most immediate response for women at risk, but they are only temporary. Women need to live safely beyond shelter.

The Beyond Shelter Walls project revealed the paramount need for coordinated policies across sectors at all levels of government and in all jurisdictions. Poverty, housing and homelessness, the legal system, conditions of life in northern Canada, and exclusion and marginalisation are all factors that can impact women as they leave shelter and threaten the success of their transition to community. Policy coordination requires a holistic approach grounded in women's lived realities.

"We can't just keep on looking at housing as a separate and discrete issue for women," said one research participant, "we have to look at things like income support for women. We have to look at issues for women living in marginalised communities. We have

to look at policing issues. We have to look at employment, at job re-training, at childcare – the whole picture. We can't continue approaching post-abuse issues in a piecemeal fashion."

### COORDINATED POLICIES NEEDED

The research showed the need for comprehensive policies like a national poverty reduction strategy and a national housing strategy that includes emergency, second-stage, and permanent housing. Key legal reforms would ensure that all women have legal representation for proceedings and that violence is always taken into account when determining custody and access.

Women in Canada's north do not have adequate access to shelter, police protection, and permanent housing. Policies must reduce the isolation and lack of infrastructure in Canada's north and include self-determined housing strategies for Inuit, First Nations, Métis and urban Aboriginal women.

Shelters must become fully accessible for women with disabilities, and for women who speak different languages. Women arriving in Canada need to know their legal rights and the VAW services available to them.

Detailed policy recommendations include a Women's Advocate to guide each woman through services and systems, mandatory education on VAW as part of professional training for all professions working with women fleeing violence, and embedding violence awareness and prevention programs in school curricula across the country.

The changes needed are extensive and will require the sharing of policy and programme successes as well as focused leadership from the national government. With advocates from across the country, YWCA Canada is working to achieve these essential reforms. ■

# Excerpts from the World YWCA statement to 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

**T**he World YWCA joins the United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women and organisations around the world in commemorating 15 years since the Fourth World Conference of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

Great advances have been made since 1995, especially in the areas of women in decision-making, laws, policies and education. [However] despite advances, the situation for women, young women and girls in communities is still deplorable.

The last 15 years have shown the importance as well as inadequacies of gender mainstreaming as an approach. The next 15 years demand new approaches that build on what works while accelerating the

transformative actions for women's empowerment and gender equality.

The intersections of the 12 areas of the Beijing Platform for Action must be addressed and future solutions must be derived from a multicultural approach.

A strong human rights based approach can ensure that gender equality is at the centre of the MDGs. Many international instruments provide member states with clear direction on how to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. Identifying linkages between the BPFA, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other instruments is crucial.

## Recommendations

### The World YWCA calls on the Commission on Status of Women to:

- 1 Invest in women and girls:** Adequate and accessible funding must be provided for services that provide holistic solutions to the factors that prevent gender equality and women's empowerment.
- 2 Ensure the safety and security of women and girls:** Create safe spaces, to ensure the physical, sexual and psychological safety of women and girls in all aspects of their lives.
- 3 Involve women:** All women including women working at the community level, young women and women living with HIV must be meaningfully involved in relevant decision-making, respecting their right to self-determination and enabling their participation in developing strategies to overcome the challenges they face.

- 4 Expand access to comprehensive services:** Through a lifecycle and multicultural approach ensure women and girls have access to information and services they need to live healthy lives.
- 5 Promote women's leadership:** Women from all sectors of society should be equitably represented at all levels in national, political, executive, legislative and judicial structures.
- 6 Keep promises made:** Commitments made on HIV and AIDS, SRHR, VAW must be respected and laws that promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women enforced as directed by CEDAW.

# Young Women on the Move

## VIEWPOINT:

**The most critical area of concern for young women for the next 15 years**

### **BPFA Concern: Violence Against Women**

World YWCA 2009 Intern Moo Moo Hsoe from YWCA of Myanmar explains why she believes that violence against women should be at the top of the women's agenda.

**V**iolence against women (VAW) is the most urgent concern for women in the world. It may be difficult to discuss because many women are not aware of their rights, even if they are being violated: tortured, forced to labour at home and raped. In conflict situations, women are targets for rape and other violations.

If they expose these violations, women may feel shamed by their communities. Many women suffer but keep silent. Even women who are tortured by their husbands at home avoid other women and keep silent. In Myanmar, this closure relates to its traditions and culture.

To empower women, the YWCA of Myanmar provides microcredit to more than 3,000 members around the country. But this alone cannot promote women in decision-making positions. Women and their partners must both be educated in gender awareness and gender mainstreaming should continue in all our programmes and activities to address inequalities. Developing the full potential of all girl children is another crucial priority.



YWCA should undertake new strategies to invest in young women's leadership on social issues based on conditions in their own countries, establish more programmes for mentoring young women using intergenerational approaches, and promote increased communication among young women from different regions. ■

# Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are Human Rights

Paola Salwan, World YWCA Programme Assistant for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, calls SRHR the “cornerstone of any young women’s life,” and calls for holistic approaches to advocacy and education.



“[Reproductive rights] rest on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.”

International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action, excerpt from para. 7.3

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) reflect a range of concepts and situations that strongly impact a woman’s life including violence against women, female genital mutilation, contraception, HIV and AIDS, early marriage, and sexual orientation. A young woman defending her sexual and reproductive rights takes a stand and says to her community, her society, her world: “This is my body — my health, my rights. No one but I can control it.”

This simple statement implies a lot. In many societies, women cannot freely control how many children they have, if any, if and at what age they would like to have sexual relations; choose contraception, and protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. They may be forbidden from taking pleasure in sexual intercourse (hence female genital mutilation), or forced to marry young to unburden their families (hence child brides). They are expected to have many children (preferably boys) and should they deviate from the norm, they risk suffering gross violations.

Our mothers fought for their rights, but there is still far to go. Many obstacles still prevent women from fully enjoying their sexual and reproductive health and rights: culture, mentality and beliefs, poverty, and lack of education. Unfortunately women themselves often perpetuate harmful traditional practices. Having internalised what

they were taught, they consider a change in mentality sinful or shameful and force the same things on their daughters.

Inadequate involvement and interest from the international community is also to blame. The International Conference on Population Development and Programme of Action adopted in 1994 is useful but not legally binding. Other treaties such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 are legally binding, but no treaty specifically focusing on SRHR has been negotiated at the global level.

The solution lies in integrated, comprehensive global programmes including education for women, girls and communities about their human rights particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights; advocacy at the local, national and international levels; economic empowerment so women can become independent; and reinforced health care systems with adequately trained professionals.

It is paramount that we start tackling these issues in a holistic way on multiple levels to make a lasting difference in women’s rights. ■

# Leading Change

## Beijing + 15:

### Views from around the Movement

YWCA women of all ages assess progress made since Beijing and identify urgent concerns for women in their countries today.



#### FROM GRENADA:

**Ravika Phillip, YWCA of Grenada volunteer and World YWCA intern-elect 2010**

Violence against women in different forms remains of great concern in my community and the world. The number of cases you hear about is incredible. Despite talks and campaigns, there always seems to be more. And these are the cases we know about—many women don't speak out for fear their situation will worsen. Women in these situations are vulnerable in some way and often dependant on their abuser for money, shelter and "love". We need to continue to face this challenge. Women need empowerment to understand they don't need to stay in these situations, that they can rise—although this is easier said than done.

is better than none. The economic, social, political and domestic status of women has not improved overall. Women superstars like presidents of nations do not help empower women in the field. It's too bad, but it's true.

While domestic violence is on the rise, there probably has been some progress in the political front in that it is now considered OK to talk about. That is a big help in eventually finding solutions.

YWCA efforts to never let these issues drop off the radar screen are very important. The work in the field is important. When it comes to women's issues, righting wrongs takes a very long time. Many groups tire and switch from issue to issue in search of a quick and measurable result they can enjoy. The YWCA realises that success is measured in decades and centuries, not minutes and months. For that I thank them.



#### FROM BENIN:

**Angèle Biao Kolouchè, National President, YWCA of Benin**

The urgent concern for women in Benin is still violence against women (VAW), although there has been some progress in the last 15 years. Many

people understand the issue better and respect for women's rights is growing. Although there are laws and resolutions that defend women, implementation is still a problem. More education is needed. When waiting to speak on the radio about VAW, some commentators attacked me,



#### FROM THE USA:

**Jane Wolfe, World YWCA President 1999-2003, Member World YWCA Task Force on Peace and Justice, Member YWCA of Vermont and YWCA USA**

Very little progress has been made on all issues, but little

asking teasingly, "Is it always about women? What more do women want?" They clearly didn't understand the issue. At a YWCA of Benin training to raise awareness about VAW, women did not recognise many things as violence against them. The training helped them understand their rights.

There are also inequalities, inadequacies, and unequal access to health care and related services. There are still areas in Benin where there is no healthcare centre. Even if there is a building, there may not be adequate equipment or personnel available and because of poverty, most villagers cannot afford care.



#### FROM LIBERIA:

**Roseline K. Toweh,  
National General  
Secretary, YWCA of  
Liberia**

**W**omen in Liberia face inequalities, inadequacies, and unequal access to education and training. This is due to early pregnancy,

negative traditional society values, cultural barriers, lack of educational facilities in rural settings, parents' lack of awareness about sending girls to school, and financial constraints.

Also despite efforts to achieve power sharing and equality in decision-making at all levels, there is still inequality. More needs to be done. In Liberia advocacy efforts are ongoing for gender balance in every sector--most importantly for greater involvement of women in politics.

Urgent areas of concern for women globally are VAW and inequality in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activity and access to resources.

VAW requires a global campaign—not just for 15 years, but continuously until the world is free of it.



#### FROM CHILE:

**Vicky Rojas Araya,  
Member of the YWCA of  
YWCA Valparaíso, Chile**

**I**mprovement exists, but there is still a lot to be done in Chile. For women in the YWCA of Chile, one of the underlying factors involved in the achievement (or not) of

the areas addressed by the Beijing Platform for Action is the never ending classic stereotypes affecting women. These stereotypes foster the cross-cutting issues of discrimination and gender inequity, which prevent the creation of successful strategies in the different areas.

As a result, violence against women continues to rise. Governmental bodies provide unsatisfactory responses to gender inequity and unless they seriously undertake a change of policies regarding gender inequity, women will continue to struggle to find jobs and participate fully in public life.



#### FROM AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND:

**Lisa Hayes, World YWCA  
Board Member (2003 - 2007),  
life member and volunteer,  
YWCA Aotearoa New Zealand**

**V**iolence against women is still our most urgent concern. It is non-

discriminatory and pervades our society at all levels. It is often inculcated as acceptable, especially when there are low literacy levels or alcohol or drug abuse.

In the Pacific, HIV and AIDS (and other sexually transmitted infections) have markedly increased due to cultural mores, taboos, lack of education, different languages, lack of access to information, and the position of governments and the church. Therefore women's health has worsened and many young girls will never achieve maturity and "elder" status.

On radio talkback in our country diatribes against women's and indigenous people's human rights bolster messages of white male superiority and reinforce the status quo, undermining progress. Sadly, some women share these viewpoints.

What has improved is that many women have been able to access education. However our government has now reduced support for education to women parenting alone, making it hard for young mums to break the dependency cycle and improve their own lives and those of their children. ■

## The Beijing Platform for Action's Impact on Kenyan Legislation and Beyond

**YWCA of Kenya National General Secretary Mwajuma Alice Abok attended the Beijing Conference and continues to monitor and promote women's rights in her own country and the region.**



**K**enya has seen many advances in its legislation to protect women and children since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted and follow-up instruments and mechanisms such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) put in place by the UN.

In 2001, to better protect children Parliament passed the Children's Act under the umbrella of violence against women. The Criminal Law Amendment Act in 2003 stiffened sentences for sexual offences. A major milestone for the women and girls of Kenya was the Sexual Offences Bill enacted by Parliament in 2006. Its success has been replicated in many countries in the region.

Reforms since 1999 strengthened sustainable health care, enabling rural women to access maternity services for minimal fees. Maternity leave was extended and paternity leave introduced. But the government hasn't yet allocated a

percentage of the national budget to reproductive health. Funds for HIV and AIDS interventions including prevention, access to medical care, and support for orphans and vulnerable children have been devolved to the provincial, district and constituency level. Groups of women are now engaged and able to access funds. Advocacy against cultural practices that impact negatively on women and girls' development, for example, female genital mutilation (FGM) has been stepped up. Recently the Council of Elders in Meru spoke against the practice of FGM, which was a major boost to the YWCA Meru Branch's efforts to advocate against it in the Eastern Province.

In terms of power and decision-making, the African Union's protocol on African Women's Rights provided a strong tool for advocacy. In Kenya there has been commendable sensitisation, civic education, and lobbying that resulted in political parties adopting affirmative action policies. Women made up 60 percent of nominees to Parliament in 2002 versus 41.7 percent in 1992. Out of 381 local councillors elected in 2002, 97 were women. In addition, the President of the Republic of Kenya decreed a 30 percent inclusion of women in appointments and employment in all sectors. The government established 19 gender desks in key ministries as well as a Ministry of Gender, Women and Children, headed by a female Minister.

While efforts have been made to involve women in peace process decision-making, legislation still needs to be stepped up regarding women and armed conflict. Legislation also is needed to protect refugees and internally displaced persons.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, national gender policies have succeeded in increasing women's participation. Rwanda is leading with 56 percent women in its Parliament. Many countries have adopted national action plans on women as well. The scenario is getting better. ■

## Young women and empowerment: where to now?

**Rebecca Anandi Smith, 23, a university student in Geneva of British and Nepalese descent, discusses how to empower young women.**



**O**ne of the most important issues for me is violence against women. I myself have been a victim of violent abuse. But support from strong role models, both women and men, encouraged me to be empowered and take control. They

encouraged me to be successful and worthy — and I no longer saw myself as a victim.

Many of the powerful figures in my life are women, which is empowering for me as a young woman. My father's boss is a woman, my mother works full-time and the head of my media department at the university is a woman. Being surrounded by positive role models who have progressed in life has shown me that this can be reality. I realise I am part of a privileged minority but I feel things are changing for others too. Yes, being a young woman can have disadvantages, especially in the workplace, but I think this will only make me stronger and want to succeed more.

Women need opportunities to fight prejudice. When we prove ourselves to be equal and worthy, which we are, then we will be able to influence more women.

Remember: the more you talk about your hopes and dreams, the more you realise that you are not the only one. ■

# HIV and AIDS

## Young People versus HIV and AIDS: A Comprehensive Approach

In June 2005, the G8 leaders committed to developing a comprehensive package of HIV prevention, treatment and care aimed at achieving universal access by 2010. Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General and Special Envoy for HIV and AIDS in Asia, Dr. Nafis Sadik reflects on what future interventions are needed from governments, NGOs and civil society to ensure women and young women have universal access.

**Y**oung people are especially at risk from HIV and AIDS. Around half of the people who acquire HIV become infected before they turn 25, and AIDS is the second most common cause of death among 20-24 year olds.

Two-thirds of HIV infections are passed on by sexual contact between men and women. Lifestyles are changing – young women are delaying marriage, and a growing number of young people are sexually active outside marriage. Traditional culture is no protection – younger women often marry older men, who may or may not respect their marriage vows. Violence, in the home, in conflict situations, and through trafficking increases young women's exposure to infection.

With no cure or vaccine on the horizon, all these factors highlight the urgent need for specific steps to prevent HIV infection among young people. The key groups for

prevention awareness include not only children and young people, but also their parents, teachers, employers and others in contact with them. Successful programmes for young people involve

them directly, and include their perspectives based on age, lifestyle, and needs.

Health policies must address the whole spectrum of young people's sexual and reproductive health and take their special needs into account. There are three key areas of focus.

### EDUCATION

Education has been a development goal for many years, but few countries have given it priority. This must change. Countries must move urgently towards educating every girl, and every boy, within the next decade, at least to primary level. They must ensure education systems carry age-appropriate information on reproductive health, including the risks of infection. They must reach out to young people out of school with education, information, and services.





Women and young women need HIV prevention knowledge as well as skills to negotiate safe sex

## HEALTH

Health, including reproductive health, is another basic development goal. There has been more lip service than real action, especially where the poor are concerned. Reproductive health care is an essential part of our defence against HIV infection. Despite many years of family planning programmes, comprehensive reproductive health care is still in the future and the poor have little access. There is a great deal of ignorance and misinformation.

Reproductive health programmes, including HIV prevention, must reach out to young people, especially the most vulnerable: young women on the street, injecting drug users and migrants. They must reach young women whose husbands are violent or unfaithful. They must reach the newly married and the unmarried.

There is no time or place for discussion about whether we approve

of some behaviour or other. My analogy is to a hospital emergency room. If someone comes in with a bullet wound, we do not stop to ask questions: we remove the bullet. It is the same with HIV prevention. It is a matter of health care, not morality.

## GENDER INEQUALITY

Finally, gender inequality is still a fact of life in almost all societies. For the sake of every young woman – and every young man – in the world, we must challenge this. As well as giving women and girls equal access to education and health care, we must pay special attention to enforcing the protection our laws provide young women, within and outside marriage. We must not allow obstacles to stand in our way.

A comprehensive approach to HIV and AIDS calls for resources beyond national capacity. All countries are faced with difficult policy choices.

Prioritising young people requires a generous response from more affluent countries. HIV and AIDS know no borders: we are all affected, and we must all respond. ■



**Dr. Nafis Sadik**

**Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General and Special Envoy for HIV and AIDS in Asia**

# Briefing

## From the World YWCA



Ecumenical Service for World AIDS Day

### WORLD YWCA CALLS FOR WOMEN'S AND HIV RIGHTS ON WORLD AIDS DAY 2009

On December 1 2009, the World YWCA celebrated World AIDS Day (WAD) together with the international and local community working on HIV and AIDS. Driven by a shared desire to demonstrate their commitment to the cause of HIV, the community came together to form a spectacular human red ribbon made up of approximately 200 people from the UN, international and local networks.

A statement released by the World YWCA called on governments, international organisations and civil society to ensure that the sexual and reproductive health and rights of HIV positive women are upheld by:

- Empowering women living with HIV by providing access to information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Investing in comprehensive HIV prevention strategies grounded in SRHR and ensuring access to comprehensive services that meet the needs of all women – especially women living with HIV
- Supporting laws and policies that create a safe and secure world that protect the rights of HIV positive women to make free and responsible choices about their sexual and reproductive health
- Providing safe spaces without stigma and discrimination, especially for women living with HIV

### INTERNATIONAL DAY IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Each year on November 29, the United Nations and the international community observe the International Day in Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As a member of the Middle East Working Group with a Focus on Palestine, the World YWCA presented a statement to the UN on November 30 calling on UN member states and civil society to act to stop the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and to stand up for the rule of international law, particularly human rights and humanitarian law.

The statement noted that after 34 years of observing the day of solidarity, the Palestinian people are still no closer to realising their inalienable rights of self-determination or



The separation wall built by Israel in the West Bank divides Palestinian lands

establishing an independent state within borders stipulated in UN resolution 181. In contrast, illegal settlements and land grabbing continue in the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Statement signatories also expressed dismay at the lack of support for Justice Goldstone's report that details findings of the UN independent international fact-finding mission into the 2009 Gaza War. The report found the Israeli armed forces used disproportionate force, contradicting core principles of humanitarian law and constituting gross violations of the Geneva Conventions.

To read the Goldstone report, see:  
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/FactFinding-Mission.htm>

## 'OUR RIGHTS, OUR BODIES' DECLARE YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS OF ASIA PACIFIC YWCAS



Young women leaders of the Asia and Pacific YWCAs gathered in Melbourne, Australia to discuss SRHR, HIV and VAW in the region.

**'Our Rights--Our Bodies: Young women leading change in Asia Pacific'** was the theme of a training for young leaders covering sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS, and violence against women. Over 35 young women from Asia Pacific YWCAs gathered for the two-day training held at the end of November in Melbourne, Australia.

Participants took part in skills sessions facilitated by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, SUPPORT, and the YWCA of Papua New Guinea. A panel discussion focused on 'Reaching out to Vulnerable Communities' and correct female and male condom usage was explained.

Supported and hosted by the World YWCA in partnership with UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office and AusAID, the training aimed to build the capacity and knowledge of the young women to provide leadership in their local, national, regional and international communities. At conclusion of the event, they developed an action plan

calling for both individual action and collective responsibility to eliminate violence against women and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.

World YWCA President Susan Brennan said, "It would be great to see the Asia Pacific region take leadership in delivering young women's programmes and advocacy and in showing how young women do shared, intergenerational, transformative leadership."

Following the training, all participants attended the Asia Pacific Breakthrough Summit in Melbourne as well as World YWCA President Susan Brennan and General Secretary Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, who was a keynote speaker. The summit brought together women's groups, faith communities, and development agencies in the Asia Pacific region to collaborate on action to reach the targets set for Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5 on women's equality and maternal health.

## WORLD YWCA DAY 2010: "WOMEN CREATING A SAFE WORLD"

**S**ince 1947, World YWCA Day has been celebrated annually on April 24 and is an opportunity for YWCAs around the world to commemorate the history of this special movement. Each year the celebration has a different theme and programme that enables members to act locally for a common global goal.

On April 24, 2010, the World YWCA will focus on "Women Creating a Safe World" which is the theme for the 2010 regional trainings planned for the Middle East, Europe and Latin America and for the World Council in 2011. One important goal for World YWCA Day 2010 is to raise \$10,000 to help enable 300 YWCA women to attend regional trainings and additional funds to support YWCA women to attend World Council in 2011. In both, women will receive training in leadership, advocacy, governance, sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS, and violence against women.

Please consider a donation through the online form at:

[www.worldywca.org](http://www.worldywca.org)

To see the impact your donation could have on women's leadership, please read about the 2009 regional trainings on our website:

[www.worldywca.org/en/Leadership/Regional-Training-Institutes-RTI](http://www.worldywca.org/en/Leadership/Regional-Training-Institutes-RTI)

You can also find additional ways to support World YWCA programmes by visiting:

[www.worldywca.org/en/About-us/Support-us](http://www.worldywca.org/en/About-us/Support-us)

# People

## NATIONAL APPOINTMENTS

### New General Secretaries:

- Himalee Mudalige** - YWCA of Sri Lanka  
**Sunghee Yoo** - YWCA of Korea  
**Abra Djigbodi Amalzo** - YWCA of Togo  
**Kim Smith** - YWCA of Scotland  
**Dr. Anita Davis-Defoe** - YWCA of the Virgin Islands Inc.  
 (developing interest)

### New Presidents:

- Reem Najjar** - YWCA of Jordan  
**Pia Öhman** - YWCA of Finland  
**María Carmen Lacruz** - YWCA of Uruguay  
**Marjoleine Marijt** - YWCA of Netherlands  
**Naoko Matano** - YWCA of Japan  
**Redemptor Masese** - YWCA of Kenya

## NEW APPOINTMENTS

**Fiona Wilkie**, from Edinburgh, Scotland has been appointed World Council Coordinator as of January 2011. Fiona joined the World YWCA in 2001 as Communications Assistant and has since worked as the Systems Coordinator. Fiona is very familiar with the organisation of World Council having already played an important role in organising the two previous Councils in Kenya and Brisbane. Fiona will be leading the preparations for the World Council to be held in Zurich, Switzerland, in July 2011 under the theme "Women Creating a Safe World".

## FAREWELL

At the end of 2009, the World YWCA bid farewell to **Kaburo Kobia** who served as Communications Director for three years. Kaburo joined the World office at a crucial time in the preparation of the 2007 World Council and the International Women's Summit. Kaburo led the communications department in successfully positioning the movement's flagship publication Common Concern to address the organisation's key priorities. Kaburo has been instrumental in building a strong and clear communications strategy in support of YWCA programmes, key events, and activities. The YWCA movement will dearly miss her as she returns to her native Kenya to join the Information and Communications Technology Board, a state corporation associated with the Ministry of Information and Communications.

The World YWCA says also goodbye to **Dr. Helene Yinda**, Programme Director for Africa and the Middle East, who has been with the World YWCA for nearly 10 years. Helene has seen the growth of YWCAs in Africa and has been at the helm of YWCA work on HIV and AIDS. The World YWCA is also grateful for her leadership on work in the Middle East, including participation in two critical Witness Visits to the region including Palestine. As a theologian, Helene brought a clear commitment to the Christian values of the organisation. A mentor who nurtured many, Helene played a central role in the formative years of the African YWCA Network (AYNET), based in Accra, Ghana. Happily, Helene will continue to serve the movement as AYNET's first Executive Director.

The movement wishes Helene and Kaburo all the best in the future!



Fiona Wilkie



Kaburo Kobia



Dr. Helene Yinda

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**Kaburo Kobia** (Switzerland)

**Joelle Logue Bronstein** (USA) in memory of Catherine Badea

**Juliata Keya Malakar** (Bangladesh)

**Amy McGregor** (Canada)

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**World YWCA Board** (Switzerland)

**YWCA Canada** - Brandon (Canada)

**YWCA Canada** - Brandon (Canada) in memory of Catherine Badea

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**YWCA Canada** - Lethbridge & District (Canada)

**YWCA Canada** - Lethbridge & District (Canada) in honour of Kelly Areshenko, Marquise Bourdon-Harris, Beverley Hranac and Natalie Primeau

**YWCA Canada** - Vancouver (Canada)

**YWCA of Australia** - XYZ Group of Perth (Australia)

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