

Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace concluded its deliberations in Beijing on Sept. 15, 1995, with adoption by consensus of the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Canada's objective at the Conference was to achieve agreement on practical measures to accelerate progress towards equality between men and women.

The Platform for Action reaffirms important gains for women achieved at recent world conferences on the environment (1992), human rights (1993), population (1994) and social development (1995). The Beijing Platform builds on previous achievements in the areas of women's rights as human rights, violence against women and economic equality.

Highlights of key achievements include:

- *The universality of women's rights*
Agreement that governments have an obligation to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls, regardless of cultural or religious traditions.
- *The prevention and elimination of violence against women*
Reaffirmation that violence against women is not a private issue and that states cannot invoke customs, traditions or religion to avoid their obligation to eliminate violence against women.
- *Rape as a war crime*
Reaffirmation that rape in armed conflict constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity. Introduction of the concept of rape as genocide, under certain circumstances. (Canadian initiative)
- *Gender guidelines for refugees*
First-time recognition in a UN document that sexual violence and gender-related persecution are grounds for refugee status. Agreement on strong language calling on states to develop gender-related guidelines in considering claims for refugee status. (Canadian initiative)
- *Reproductive rights/right to control fertility*
Agreement on the right, not just the ability, of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, as basic to their own empowerment. Builds on consensus language, strongly supported by Canada, achieved at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.