

A CALL BY
THE COALITION FOR SEXUAL AND BODILY RIGHTS IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES
ON THE 10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOURTH WOMEN'S WORLD CONFERENCE

We, non-governmental organizations and experts from several countries of the Middle East, North Africa and South/Southeast Asia have come together to advance, promote and defend sexual, bodily and reproductive rights as human rights. We believe that the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Conference constitutes an occasion to recall the commitments made by our governments to the Beijing Platform for Action. This decade, having witnessed important achievements in and advancement of women's human rights, marks the culmination of an era that acknowledges women's rights as human rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights as an integral part of human rights.

However, many governments have fallen short of delivering the outcomes to which they have committed. Lack of democracy and intricate mechanisms of political, economic, social, legal and cultural manipulation that aim to control women's sexuality and the many taboos surrounding sexuality forestall the full implementation of the BPFA and the realization of gender equality in our societies.

Human rights violations such as sexual and gender based violence, marital rape, FGM, honor crimes, forced and early marriages, acid attacks, mass rapes and trafficking in women and virginity tests continue to affect women in our region. Many of these problems are exacerbated by the negative effects of the ongoing wars, military interventions and economic globalization. As we have witnessed in the last decades, religious right ideologies have increasingly misused religion and culture to maintain and extend their power over both public and private domains.

The realization of the right to sexual and bodily integrity, and women's right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality free from coercion, discrimination and violence are essential for women and girls to realize and enjoy their human rights. This requires that women have full gender equality in the family; access to economic, political, social and educational opportunities; as well as access to high quality health services in particular sexual and reproductive health services.

We call upon our governments to:

Reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action without any reservations, and display the political will and allocate sufficient resources for its implementation;

Withdraw all reservations to the CEDAW and ratify its Optional Protocol;

Revise, enact and/or reinforce all the legal system, in particular the penal codes and family and personal status codes in order to ensure full gender equality and realize sexual, bodily and reproductive rights;

Adopt and implement "rights-based" programs and policies to ensure access to comprehensive, affordable and quality sexual and reproductive health services and sexuality education and information for all, including the youth;

Increase budgetary allocations and financial resources for programs and institutions to ensure gender equality;

Develop policies and programs that aim to reduce and eliminate feminization of poverty.

We urge the international community to take a stand against the manipulation of political and economic power perpetuating socio-economic and social injustices; increasing political instability; the assertion of military power; ideologies that fuel racism, Islamophobia and constructed “cultural clashes” that lead to aggravation of gender inequality, violations of women’s human rights and exploitation of women and girls.

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