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**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS CONFERENCE
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**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

At the NGO Forum over the past week, women activists battled to make their voices heard as freedom of expression was stifled in Huairou by the heavy security presence of the Chinese security.

At the official government conference that started this week, we are now all fighting the battle of the brackets. A battle that will focus on the Platform for Action, the key conference document which aims to commit governments to improving women's lives and rights.

At this stage, the document is still riddled with contradictions and brackets. Brackets that contain the crunch issues that governments are still hotly contesting and that surround crucial concepts and commitments from governments. What is in these brackets could make or break the Platform of Action as a document that really counts for women.

Much of that debate and disagreement is on the central issue of human rights. Our latest count shows that there were still 651 brackets in the 131 page document that the conference started discussing this week. Close to one quarter of those brackets are in the sections on violence, armed conflict, and human rights, the areas where Amnesty has most concerns. And as long as those brackets are in the document, the human rights of women are still at stake.

I would now like to point out a few of the contradictory or contested areas. Paragraph 216 of the Platform of Action clearly states that

The World Conference on Human Rights reaffirmed clearly that the human rights of women throughout their lifecycle are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

Paragraph 213 repeats the same fundamental point in greater detail, but is still in brackets.

When this came up for debate yesterday, it was deferred for debate later in the conference. It is astounding that at this stage the document is still laced with such fundamental inconsistencies. To agree and at the same time disagree on the universality of the human rights of women. It is even more astounding that two years after 171 governments from around the world agreed in Vienna that women's rights were an integral part of human rights this issue is again opened up for debate.

What is the point of successive UN conferences if some governments try to renege on the commitments they make at one conference and try to turn the clock back instead of moving

forward? And how can some governments at the end of the 20th century still be seriously questioning whether women are full human beings who are entitled to full human rights? How can this be controversial?

One of Amnesty's key demands from this conference is, therefore, that governments should not unravel the commitments they have already made to universality and indivisibility, and should move forward and build on those commitments. Unfortunately, the brackets continue, touching on other key issues for Amnesty.

- one part of the Platform for Action now condemns state violence against women.

Yet as of yesterday, there was still no agreement in the human rights section for governments to take urgent action to combat and eliminate all forms of violence against women in private and public life ... especially in situations of armed conflicts.

- the opening section dealing with armed conflict is so riddled with brackets as to be meaningless.

What is needed now is not just for governments to recognize that women are disproportionately the victims of human rights violations in armed conflict, but to make clear that every member of the armed forces must abide by international humanitarian and human rights standards.

- Although the Platform for Action calls on governments to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it does not take as strong a line on other international and regional human rights standards and treaties even though some of them are particularly relevant to the protection of the rights of women.

While the Platform calls on governments to ratify CEDAW, at this stage it does still not ask them to do so without limiting reservations or to withdraw any reservations they have already lodged. What this means in practical terms is that governments limit what they do to protect the rights of women. There are now 138 governments that have ratified this convention, but they have done so with an exceptionally high number of reservations. We think it is essential that a World Conference on Women takes a strong line on urging all governments to fully ratify this crucial convention on the rights of women, which was already agreed in Vienna.

The serious negotiations on all the contested areas I have mentioned only started yesterday, and it is too early to single out the governments that are stumbling blocks to progress for women.

When we hold our informal press briefings each day at 1pm, we will tell you which governments are blocking progress. Because we want to send the message to the governments that are working behind the scenes to hinder the human rights of women that we are watching, and that we will expose them.

So far I have talked about principles and positions. Now I want to talk about action and money. This is the key to the conference.

Even if the Platform for Action includes everything that Amnesty -- and women worldwide -- want, it will have little impact if governments do not come up with a clear plan of action and back this with money. And again, the crucial sentence in the Platform that would provide resources to put the Platform into action is disputed. Those brackets MUST be lifted for the Platform to make a real difference to the lives of women. If the debate around the Platform of Action is fraught with divisions, we have to ask what this says about the real commitment of the international community to quickly take action on what is decided. The Platform of Action will be an important signal of the intention of governments on the rights of women and will be used by women worldwide to measure the performance of those very same governments.

But governments must leave this conference with a genuine commitment -- reflected in a clear plan of action -- to take clear and concrete measures to improve the rights of women.
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