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FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE

14 SEPTEMBER 1995

STATEMENT BY  
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Over the past two weeks, we have heard many governments say that this conference should be about action and not words, about reality and not rhetoric.

Those are their words, not ours. But I couldn't agree more.

The Platform for Action that will emerge from the discussions over these 10 days will set out the agenda for improving the lives -- and the human rights -- of women worldwide.

What governments actually do over the 1500 plus days to the end of the century will show whether they are committed to achieving Equality by the Year 2000.

The first step, of course, is to have a strong and clear Platform.

On Amnesty International's first day in Beijing, we set out our demands from the conference. Even though discussions are continuing as I speak, at this stage it looks like on paper those demands have been met.

Our demands to the conference were for governments to:

- reaffirm the commitment they made two years ago to the universality and indivisibility of the human rights of women
- recognize the violence that women suffer at the hands of the state and make a commitment to ending that violence, bringing perpetrators to justice and paying compensation to victims.
- state that rape in armed conflict is a human rights violation, and make a commitment to live up to international humanitarian and human rights law during armed conflict
- make a commitment to work towards eradicating violence, like female genital mutilation, in family and society.
- make a strong commitment that all human rights of women activists would

be guaranteed

- and step up their efforts to ratify and implement international treaties that have an impact on the human rights of women

In a few words, this is a document that Amnesty International can do business with to hold governments accountable.

And getting down to business is exactly what governments and the United Nations now need to do.

Governments must now state clearly how and when they will implement the action set out in the Platform.

We will be watching to see if, for example, they do ratify and implement international standards, bring perpetrators of torture, "disappearances" and political killings to justice, and stop the human rights violations of women activists.

The United Nations must now integrate action on women into all of its activities, including by placing higher priority on human rights violations against women.

But as I said earlier, discussions are still underway and threats are still looming.

First, the threat that in the final stages of debate governments will not pull together what they have agreed so far, and will weaken the final Platform. This includes the debate over "respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds".

Second, the threat that governments will lodge reservations to the agreed Platform, effectively picking and choosing what areas of the Platform they will work on.

And finally, the threat that when governments leave Beijing they will not put the Platform INTO action.

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On our first day in Beijing, I said that we have come here to campaign on the human rights of women and the results so far show the effects of that campaigning.

But I also said Amnesty International would not be silent on human rights violations in China.

Not only because we are here in China, but also because China has over one fifth of the world's population and an emerging global economic force. This places a special responsibility on the government to make sure that human rights are not denied to one fifth of humanity.

Progress has been made in moving towards freedom from want, but freedom from fear is still not a right of the Chinese people.

Since we arrived in this country, Amnesty International members appealed directly to the Chinese authorities on human rights violations in China .

Thousands and thousands of urgent appeals on death sentences, imminent executions, and prisoners of conscience.

And appeals for Ding Zilin and her husband Jiang Peikun, who were arrested and reportedly accused of "economic irregularities" on 18 August. According to one source, however, the real reason for their arrest was to prevent Ding Zilin from making contact with people attending the World Conference on Women. She is reported to be held in Wuxi.

Ding Zilin is not alone. Since the start of the conference, the relatives of at least seven activists have been under virtual house arrest to prevent them from making contact with participants at the forum and conference.

For some of these mothers and wives of activists and prisoners of conscience this has meant 24-hour surveillance, reporting telephone conversations, and in one case being ordered to join her husband in prison.

One of these women, Wang Lingyun, the mother of student leader and prisoner of conscience Wang Dan, has apparently been under constant surveillance since 26 August to prevent "foreigners who are attending the women's conference from visiting the family".

Before we leave Beijing, we will be raising our concerns with the Chinese authorities about this harassment, by letter or in a meeting.

While we have been here, the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Tibet Autonomous Region was marked on 1 September. In the run up to that anniversary, dozens of people were arrested and some are reported to have been tortured. We are continuing our investigations into this crackdown.

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These human rights violations are not, of course, unique to China.

Harassment of relatives of activists, suppression of political dissent and state executions blacken the human rights records of governments around the world. And the victims as often as not are women.

We showed this repression earlier this year when we published this report on human rights violations against women, and during the NGO Forum here when we collected signatures on petitions for a dozen women who are victims of those violations.

Indeed, our involvement in this World Conference on Women has strengthened our conviction that human rights violations against women must be better identified, documented, publicized and stopped.

It is for those women that we are speaking. And for those women that radical action is needed to end human rights violations.

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