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Beijing +10: US joins consensus on women's human rights

Amnesty International today welcomed the decision by the United States to join the world consensus and reaffirm the commitments made a decade ago at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing. It urged the Commission on the Status of Women not to lose any more time to work for their full implementation.

"Today is a victory for women around the world. The US decision to join consensus allows the Commission to refocus its energies to the real task at hand: implementation of human rights of women," said Alexandra Arriaga, director of government relations for Amnesty International USA. "This meeting is the time to review progress and setbacks, discuss pressing challenges, and focus on how to move forward."

Earlier this week, the United States proposed amendments to a draft political declaration, which threatened to derail the work of the Commission. Nations from every region together with women from every continent protested and urged the US delegation to withdraw their proposal and affirm the declaration unequivocally. Today the United States did just that. This was the right decision to make. Now, the Commission can turn its attention to the crucial needs of women and full implementation of their rights.

"Five crucial days have been lost on an initiative that was resoundingly rejected," said Hilary Fisher, head of the Amnesty International delegation to the CSW. "Those days should have been used instead on strategies for making the rights of women a reality."

In the decade since the World Conference on Women there has been progress. In countries as diverse as Rwanda, Afghanistan and Bahrain, women asserted their rights and are asserting their full participation in every aspect of their society. Nevertheless, violence against women is endemic. Women represent the fastest growing population infected by HIV/AIDS, largely due to domestic and sexual violence. In conflicts throughout the world, women are subject to rape, mutilation and murder. Those who survive face severe obstacles, denied property rights, health services, and protection before the law.

The large representation of women human rights campaigners at the Commission demonstrates the great importance of the reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These documents are a tool for women to hold governments accountable to act on their commitments, strengthen rights for women, and improve their conditions.

The empowerment of women and assurance of gender equality are central to the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals. The human rights of women are also advanced by ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The unanimous endorsement of the political declaration underscores that rights of women are human rights and that all nations must prioritize the respect and protection of these rights.

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