

Embargoed for : 05/06/2000 17:00 GMT

Beijing + 5: No going back on women's human rights

NEW YORK -- It is completely unacceptable for governments to try to undermine the commitments they made in Beijing five years ago, said Amnesty International on the opening day of the Special Session on Women at the United Nations General Assembly.

The Beijing Platform for Action, a blueprint for achieving women's equality, development and peace, was adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women in 1995. Governments have now come together in New York to review the implementation of this set of commitments.

"In the preparatory sessions some governments have been challenging the very basis of what was reaffirmed in Beijing: that women's rights are human rights," Amnesty International said.

"The unholy alliance formed by the Holy See, Iran, Algeria, Nicaragua, Syria, Lybia, Morocco and Pakistan has attempted to hold ransom women's human rights."

The very notion of human rights has been categorised as a "difficult" issue during last week's preparatory session.

References to human rights treaties are being removed from the draft document to be adopted by this Session, including references to the most recently adopted treaty on women's rights adopted by the General Assembly unanimously*.

The responsibility of states to ensure the human rights of women in both their public and private lives, which is well established under international law, is being questioned by some states.

There have been some positive achievements at the international level in the intervening five years since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted:

*the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been adopted by the UN General Assembly (Namibia has become the first country to ratify it);

the Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted explicitly recognising that certain gender-related crimes, such as rape and other forms of sexual violence are war crimes and also may amount to crimes against humanity.

"Some governments have come to New York with the genuine aim of reviewing the Beijing Platform for Action in the context of the realities of women's lives in their own countries," Amnesty International said.

"A number of Latin American and Southern African countries have played an exemplary role in attempting to steer the Beijing + 5 process towards a meaningful outcome. Their efforts, however, have been hampered by a handful of countries after months of negotiation."

"We already have a document: the Beijing Platform for Action. Any final document adopted at this Special Session must demonstrate governments' political will to translate their

promises at Beijing into action. The women of the world will accept nothing less."

\ENDS....

For more information please contact Judit Arenas, Media Officer at Beijing + 5, on international mobile +44 7778 472 119.

<http://www.amnesty.org>
