

## Key Strategies Proposed in Banjul for Governments to Further Empower African Women

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Banjul, The Gambia, 18 November 2009 (ECA) – A wide cross section of experts, civil society organizations and key stakeholders with an interest in women's empowerment and gender equality agreed on a way forward to improve the lives of African women.

The deliberations brought to a close the expert session of the Eighth African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15). The meeting was a chance for participants to review the five years of progress and challenges for the continent's women as well as develop key recommendations for progress.

Discussions began a day earlier, with delegates divided into seven thematic groups – economic empowerment, peace and security, violence against women, women's representation and participation in all areas of decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, climate change and food security, and financing for gender equality.

The groups looked at the progress made in these areas as well as the challenges that lay ahead. They were then charged to develop key strategic actions that would accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action – a 20-year- plan agreed during the 1995 Beijing Summit on Women. The Summit stressed the need to accelerate action towards achieving gender equality and effectively empowering women and promoting their human rights. With only five years remaining on the plan, governments' delegates had a sense of urgency in structuring the commitments and concrete activities to be undertaken to improve women's lives.

Among the key strategies presented were:

- Empowerment of Women: Priority should be given to employment creation for women through targeted entrepreneurship, skills and business development, paying particular attention to the needs of rural women.
- Peace and Security: Capacity building and peer learning should be encouraged in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as human rights education.
- Violence against women: Countries should ensure that in the next five years they build multi-sectoral and multi-faceted plans to address gender based violence that is underpinned by social mobilization, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation.
- Women's representation and participation: Constitutional guarantees should be in place to provide for gender parity, which would be enforced by affirmative action measures such as quotas for both public and private areas of decision making.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health/HIV and AIDS: HIV/AIDS should be treated as an inseparable component of sexual and reproductive health and information on this should be easily accessible to men and women.
- Climate change and food security: Gender needs to be integrated into existing and upcoming science and research on climate change and climate change policy.
- Finance for gender equality: The agenda for women should receive full financial support.

Working late into the night, delegates laboured over the report's final details. These recommendations will be presented to Ministers who will discuss them and decide on the way forward for African Governments to empower women.

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