



Ecumenical Women

at the United Nations

Dear Sister of Faith,

As advocates and organizers for the empowerment of women, we are writing to seek your help.

Next year is the 15th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, a milestone for global women's rights. The "12 areas of concern," outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, charted a course in which all women might have their human rights respected and can access education, health care and economic opportunities.

While governments no longer see this agenda as a priority, we believe it remains relevant and urgent for women today.

We want to tell governments, UN agencies, donors and NGOs around the world that the Beijing Platform still matters and that its full implementation is important to women, men and children around the world. In short: we want to Resurrect Beijing!

Millions of dollars were invested in the Beijing Conference and preparation process, but relatively little has been done to track the outcomes or progress. Therefore we are asking for your help to review the advances made and challenges that women still face 15 years after Beijing **by organizing a local meeting about women's rights in your community or region**. We hope that holding local meetings will inspire grassroots women around the world to connect and learn from each other, as well as show governments we are still calling for implementation of Beijing Platform.

The event you hold can be anytime before March 2010. The scope of the meeting is up to you. Since planning meetings can be time consuming and costly, our recommendation is to organize meetings to review the Beijing Platform in conjunction with other organized conferences or events.

While all twelve areas of the Beijing Platform for Action are still important (see below for full listing), we invite you to specifically **focus on identifying and strategizing to change the institutional barriers to women's advancement**. As faith-based institutions, we are aware of institutional barriers to women's advancement within our own church structures. Other "institutional barriers" could be cultural or legal practices within the institutions of family and marriage; institutional access to hospitals, schools, markets, businesses, banks, courts, parliaments, police departments; or instituted laws of property ownership, police protection, inheritance, as well as decision-making structures of local & national government.

The gathering should be tailored to your context, and we urge you to use it as an opportunity to reach out to other groups in your community in order to broaden the conversation about gender equality and justice. To

assist you in holding, planning, and reporting on this gathering, we have created a template agenda and reporting form. More materials are available on <http://ecumenicalwomen.org>.

We ask the following of you upon completion of this meeting:

- By filling out and submitting a reporting form to us, Ecumenical Women will be able to share your priorities at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in February 2010, where there will be a review of the progress made on the Beijing Platform for Action over the last 15 years. Ecumenical Women will also share your priorities during the related preparatory processes including a global NGO pre-forum. You can find a reporting format below.
- Send a letter to your government informing them that this meeting was held, the outcome of the meeting and that the Beijing Platform for Action is still important to women in your city/country/region.
There is a sample letter included in these materials.

We know that working for gender equality can be difficult and lonely work. As a coalition of faith-based organizations, we have found that allies and networks add incredible energy to our work. You are our priority, we value your work, and we want to hear from you.

In solidarity,

Emily Davila
Chair, Ecumenical Women

Ecumenical Women is a coalition of 14 mainline global Christian organizations that advocate for gender equality at the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. You can learn about us at our website: <http://ecumenicalwomen.org>

Members: Anglican Communion Observer, Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, Church Women United, Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran World Federation, National Council of Churches USA, Presbyterian Church USA, Salvation Army, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, World Conference on Religions for Peace (collaborator), World Council of Churches, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Student Christian Federation, World YWCA



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RESURRECT BEIJING! Calling for a Renewed Commitment to Women's Rights

Beijing Platform for Action Priority Areas

- * Women and Poverty
- * Education and Training of Women
- * Women and Health
- * Violence against Women
- * Women and Armed Conflict
- * Women and the Economy
- * Women in Power and Decision-making
- * Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women
- * Human Rights of Women
- * Women and the Media
- * Women and the Environment
- * The Girl-child

Thank you for organizing a local / national / regional meeting to discuss gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action in your community! This guide is intended to help you hold your discussions. It is only a *suggested framework* and may be adapted to suit your context.

This section includes:

- Goals and background for holding a meeting on the Beijing Platform for Action
- Guidelines for Holding a Meeting
- Sample Agenda
- Reporting Form
- Sample Advocacy Letter to your Government

GOALS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Why is the Beijing Platform for Action important?

In 1995, more than 40,000 women from around the world gathered in Beijing, China to create a landmark roadmap for gender equality called the “Beijing Platform for Action,” containing 12 critical focus-areas dealing with different aspects of women’s lives. Since then the international agenda has been filled with many urgent issues: conflict, climate change, and economic crisis. However, the Beijing Platform for Action remains one of the strongest tools the international community has for creating societies that empower women.

To monitor and advocate for the implementation of the Platform, every year more than 2,000 women come to the United Nations at the Commission on the Status of Women, the world’s leading forum for taking up the global concerns of women. You can participate in this process by holding local, national, and/or regional meetings and reporting on the results. Your feedback will be incorporated in this forum, in addition to building coalitions and momentum for gender equality in your community.

The 12 critical areas for concern of the Beijing Platform for Action:

1. The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
2. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
3. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
4. Violence against women
5. The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
6. Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
7. Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
8. Insufficient mechanisms (institutional barriers) at all levels to promote the advancement of women
9. Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
10. Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
11. Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
12. Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

Note: These issues were identified in 1995. As such, there are now additional critical emerging issues such as the use of rape as a weapon of war and the feminization of AIDS.

What is the goal of holding Beijing Gatherings before March 2010?

- Build alliances by creating local networks
- Share strategies and success stories that have worked to advance women
- Identify and expose barriers to advancement of women
- Strategize next steps to contact national governments or church leaders
- Determine the advocacy agenda for Ecumenical Women at the 2010 CSW
- Collect stories from the grassroots to use for advocacy at the 2010 CSW

ORGANIZING AN ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

What are the steps to planning a meeting?

- 1) Form a planning team. As you begin to plan, ask yourself the questions: Which leaders do you need on board to ensure this will be a challenging and energizing meeting? Are there other organizations you would like to collaborate with in planning this meeting? Who has resources and space to meet in and materials you can use? Invite other groups in the community that you may have worked with before, or would like to know. Consider how you can gather women together across boundaries of income, religion, place, age and ethnicity. Come up with a title for your meeting that will appeal to participants. Determine how you will form the agenda (for example, will you have prepared presentations, such as sharing of case study that helped women?).
- 2) Send out an invitation to your members. Create an invitation, making sure to list all the organizing partners as co-sponsors of the event so that it looks large and important. Target a few new organizations or religious groups you do not usually work with. Consider inviting an officer from a United Nations agency like UNIFEM or UNPFA, or a representative from women's NGO to serve as resource person or listener. You could also invite the media to cover the event. You could also invite a well-known leader or a person in a high level office as an honorary chair to draw attendance. Think about men who are your allies, or potential allies, and decide if you want to include men in this meeting. Designate someone to make follow-up calls or emails. Follow-up with those you invite by phone, email, or in person. Talk about the meeting at other events through word of mouth to create buzz about it. Create a hospitable environment by providing food and a comfortable meeting space.
- 3) Designate leaders for the meeting:

Worship Leader/ Chaplain: The worship leader should take one of the scripture studies identified in this packet and tailor it to the meeting. How can you begin your meeting with energy and spirit? How can you create connectedness in the room? Consider songs to sing, or asking people for prayers. Make sure to include prayers from different religious traditions depending on who is at the meeting. This person should also watch out for the health of the meeting, if someone is having difficulty or needs personal follow-up. She might state at the beginning that it is natural for discussions such as the ones planned for the day might raise personal memories or pain for participants, and that chaplains are available to speak with if a participant wishes. If you make such an announcement, prepare your chaplains (they do not have to be ordained clergy, but should be women experienced with these issues and with working with people in a pastoral way). Two contextual bible studies have been provided in this packet.

Facilitator: The facilitator's job is to run the meeting making sure everyone has a chance to speak, and that the conversation remains constructive. The facilitator should be able to summarize the discussion and move it forward. The facilitator should also be intuitive, and be able to ask follow-up questions if someone is not being clear or has something exciting to share. She should be able to react and adapt to the discussion as it happens so that the meeting is productive for all involved.

Rapporteur: The Rapporteur should take notes on what is said at the meeting, and fill out the reporting form included in this information to send to the address indicated. The rapporteur should have the ability to discern what is important and synthesize the meeting's discussion.

Artist and/or Photographer: Working with the Worship Leader, this person should somehow interpret the meeting through art. By drawing or illustrating the discussions, or their outcome, this person could also help include visual element to the worship, such as through the creation of an altar. This person should also take a photograph to be sent to Ecumenical Women headquarters in New York.

Follow-up Leader/Team: This person or group will be designated at the meeting, and should take lead on following up on steps agreed to at the meeting.

RESURRECT BEIJING! - SAMPLE AGENDA

9:00-10:30am

Celebrate, reflect, worship

Contextual Bible Study (see below)

Sing

10:30-11:30am

Introduce goals of the meeting and introduce participants to one another

1) Introduce the Day

a) Explain the goals of the day.

b) Review the day's agenda. Introduce the Rapportuer, Facilitator, and Chaplain.

c) Explain the Beijing Platform for Action, if possible have one woman who is already familiar with it or remembers hearing about the meeting in 1995 say why it is important and tell one story about going to or hearing about the Beijing conference.

d) Introduce the 12 areas of concern, giving local examples for each one if possible.

2) Introduce Participants - Have each person share why they have come to the meeting and where you are from (location, organization). Break into small groups if necessary, to try to mix people up.

3) Group discussion

a) Discuss the meaning of institutional barriers. An institution could be the church, the school system, the government, the law. Or it could be cultural, within the family or marriage.

b) Have each woman share: 1) What is a barrier that you are facing personally?, and 2) What is a barrier to all women you are concerned about?

c) The Facilitator should write down barriers on flip chart and then at the end summarize which ones are said, emphasizing the one that is repeated the most.

11:30-12:30pm

Empowerment Case Study

1) Invite a representative from a local women's group to share a presentation about one strategy they have used for the advancement of women in their context (legal rights, education, monitoring budgets etc.). This should be something women can learn from, encouraging, inspiring, yet replicable. It should also include concrete details, how the group operates, how often they meet, what tools they use to succeed.

For example, a grassroots women network called GROOTS in Kenya were very concerned that after a man would die of AIDS, relatives and neighbors would take over the property and home, forcing the grieving women and children out onto the street. The group decided to serve as community watchdog that would support the women and children and call attention in the community when women and children

lost their property rights. Some of the same women later went on a grassroots women exchange to Honduras to share lessons with women organizers there.

2) Ask for response from audience, what can participants learn from the case study?
Do others have positive strategies to share?

12:30pm

Break for meal

1:30

Identify top priority barrier

1) Facilitator summarizes priority barrier(s) discussion held in the morning. Depending on size you can pick more than one to be addressed in small groups.

2) Break into small groups to discuss how to tackle barrier(s). Each group should present a proposal for action to the larger group.

- a. What assets does the group have to address this barrier?
- b. How can the group take action to dismantle this barrier?
- c. What kind of advocacy should be undertaken?
- d. Who should concerns about this be addressed to? Church leader, Member of Government, Local leader?

3) Each group reports back to large groups

4) Decide next steps, who will take the lead in advocacy or starting a new project or calling the next meeting?

3:30

Wrap Up & Closure

- 1) Say a prayer for the leaders who will follow-up on discussions
- 2) Tell participants that their feedback will be given to Ecumenical Women
- 3) Closing words by Chaplain or other leader

RESURRECT BEIJING! - REPORTING FORM

You can also fill this out online at <http://ecumenicalwomen.org>. Please attach additional pages if necessary.

Name of person filling this form:

Organization, role:

Phone:

Email:

Address:

Name of Organization who hosted this meeting:

Date of meeting:

Other Organizations attending the meeting:

Number of people: ___ Men ___ Women

If possible, please attach a list of everyone who attended, and the agenda you used for this meeting.

What was the reaction of women to the Beijing Platform for Action? Circle all that apply:

Uninterested Confused Interested Very Interested

No support Weak Support Some support Strong Support

What was the subject of your empowerment case study? Please describe case.

What questions and reactions arose to it?

What priorities emerged in your conversations? Please list up to five.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What do you want your government to change? Name one law or policy they should change, enact, or further implement?

Who might you work with to engage on these priorities?

What tools / skills do women need to meet these priorities?

What do you want the international community to know?

Church leaders?

The United Nations?

Your government?

What follow-up steps will you take as a result of this meeting?

Please paste or attach photo.

SAMPLE ADVOCACY LETTER

To: Government Leader
ADDRESS
COUNTRY

DATE

Dear _____,

We are writing you on behalf of ____ women gathered from the following organizations listed below meeting to Review the Beijing Platform for Action.....

As women of faith, we ...

We identified the following priorities for women

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

We are requesting that you...

We kindly ask that you reply to this letter. We will follow-up via telephone call.

The results of our meeting will be represented at the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women by Ecumenical Women, a coalition of 15 Christian organizations with ECOSOC status at the United Nations.

Sincerely,

CONTACT PERSON NAME

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS ENDORSING

CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ¹: THE RAPE OF TAMAR

Biblical Passage: 2 Samuel 13: 1-22 [NRSV]

Method: Contextual Bible Study

Contextual Bible study is an interactive study bringing together the context of both the reader and Scripture into dialogue. Its goal is to not only raise awareness of the two context but to bring forth transformation in the lives of the participants and community.

As noted by Dr. Nadar, contextual Bible studies consist of 5 elements:

1. **Interactive** – reading and studying the Bible in community rather than individually. Instead of the facilitator “teaching” the answers, issues are discussed by participants, where all voices are listened to and engaged with critically.
2. **Context of the Reader** – Acknowledging and bringing the context of the reader and community in and into the study.
3. **Context of the Bible** – Reading Scripture critically by taking into account that it was written, read, translated and interpreted in a variety of contexts. This can be done by understanding the character, story, plot and genre, as well as grasping the socio-historical context.
4. **Raising Awareness** – Bringing to consciousness how the Bible and other sources of knowledge can be used as a tool for both liberation and oppression. It brings highlights how our faith, cultures and sacred texts promote just, AND points to the liberating elements of the gospel.
5. **Transformation** – Transforming the reading Scripture from one that is merely “spiritual” to social, liberating and inclusive. Recognizing the liberating message of Scripture, it fuels us to act for change and justice.

[The following directions and questions can be adapted by the facilitator and group]

[Information about the context of 2 Samuel 13 – draft would include David being king of Israel, Amnon being Tamar’s half-brother, David’s violence against Bathsheba]

Read the passage aloud

1. Tell the story in your own words.

2. Textual questions

- a. What role does each character in the passage play?
 - Amnon
 - Jonadab
 - Tamar
 - The servants
 - David
 - Absalom
- b. What were the acts of deception that led to Tamar’s rape?

¹ The method of contextual Bible study is taken from Dr. Sarojini Nadar’s powerpoint presentation, “Contextual Bible Study as a Method of Mission and Theological Education for Churches.” This slideshow is available on the Ecumenical Women website at www.ecumenicalwomen.org and should be read by the worship leader and facilitator to prepare for the session.

- c. Why was Tamar who was the victim not protected and Amnon the perpetrator not brought to justice?
- d. At which points in the story could the characters have acted to stop the rape? to bring justice? What would justice look like in this story?
- e. In this passage, what are the roles of the different genders? What were the barriers and limitations put on women during Tamar's time? In what way does it diverge from the inherent dignity, worth and personhood of all of God's people, be they male or female?

3. Bringing the Text Home

- a. Do we have women like Tamar in our context today?
- b. Do we have people like Amnons, Jonadabs, Tamars, the servants and Davids?
- c. What means in our community exist for women like Tamar to have justice met?
- d. What are the acts of deception, stereotypes or institutional structures within our communities that deny the Tamars and women in general the agency to speak, and deny the protection and justice women just as equally as men deserve?
- e. What can we do collectively to stop the Amnon-Tamar gender dynamics?
- f. What structures (be they institutional, stereotypes of gender, familial, education, or social) need to be changed for women not to become victims like Tamar? What role do men have in the process?

Passage: 2 Samuel 13: 1-22 [NRSV]

CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ²: RUTH AND NAOMI

Biblical Passage: The Book of Ruth

Read the passage aloud

1. Tell the story in your own words. ³

2. Textual questions

- a. What function in the story does each character in the story play?
 - Naomi
 - Ruth
 - Orpah
 - The men in the fields
 - Boaz
 - The women in Bethlehem
- b. Where in the story are women's human rights (according to themes in the Beijing Platform for Action) clearly not respected?
- c. What institutions in ancient Israel might have interceded (had they had the Beijing Platform for Action) to support Naomi so that Ruth and Naomi's lives were not endangered in this time of grief?
- d. Why do you think the writer of Ruth wrote this story? Do you think the writer of Ruth was a male or female? Why? How might the whole story change if women were able to access the care they need so that they did not need to be put in danger's way?
- e. What is good about such stories for our reflection? What is dangerous about such stories in scripture about women?

Bringing the Text Home

- a. Are there situations where women are unprotected by cultural or national law like this in your context today?
- b. Identify organizations and segments of populations which are currently in positions such as Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Boaz, the Men in the fields and the women in Bethlehem.
- c. What would an institution which insists upon Naomi's social protection look like? How might the different characters have responded if Naomi had had recourse other than the long and difficult journey back to Bethlehem?
- d. What structures (be they institutional, stereotypes of gender, familial, education, or social) need to be changed for women to experience social security? (It is understood that Ruth's compassion and powerful actions for the survival of her mother in law is exemplary, however, how many women die because no one near them is as strong as Ruth?) Did Boaz really help Ruth and Naomi's social security? Why yes, or why no? What might a positive masculinity look like in its ideal form in this movement from the story of Ruth and Naomi to a story where laws and institutions aided Ruth and Naomi's human dignity and rights?

² The method of contextual Bible study is taken from Dr. Sarojini Nadar's powerpoint presentation, "Contextual Bible Study as a Method of Mission and Theological Education for Churches." This slideshow is available on the Ecumenical Women website at www.ecumenicalwomen.org and should be read by the worship leader and facilitator to prepare for the session.

³ The text and video of Ecumenical Women's dramatic rendering of the Story of Ruth are also available online as resources for this Contextual Bible Study at <http://ecumenicalwomen.org>