



CONCEPT NOTE

International Conference

Beijing+25 Regional Review for Western Balkans

1. Background

The agenda for the empowerment of women and girls adopted in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, 25 years ago was a visionary response to the persistent and severe under-representation of women and gender inequality all over the world, where men's domination left women not only marginalized but also heavily discriminated in all spheres of life. World was virtually 'gender blind' by not being able to see that women as a half of the world population presents a strategic asset to be invested for a better future. There was a need for such a groundbreaking agenda that would act as an 'eye opening' for considering how important is to have women, as a half of human capital, take its role and responsibility equally with men for building a peaceful, stable and prosperous future for all.

The 1995 Beijing Conference was a critical turning point in the world's focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adoption raised high expectations for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment at the threshold of a new millennium.

What has changed or evolved in terms of gender equality and women's and girls' rights in the last 25 years across the region is a question of interest for all of us women across the world and particularly for us in the post-conflict region of Western Balkans.

The journey of women towards empowerment has experienced mix results of progress and standoffs in last 25 years. The specific history of war and peace in the entire region of the Western Balkans and the Beijing agenda for women's empowerment have been interplaying, hence, bringing diverse levels of progress in various areas of women empowerment and gender equality.

The women's outstanding activism in helping to overcome the tragic times by involving in liberation and independence movements and conflict resolution processes brought relevant credibility to women as agents of change. However, they had to face backlash by finding themselves in sidelines, immediately after the conflicts. Peace times were seen by men as 'times of power for them and not for women. This is what we women experienced in the aftermath of conflicts, and this was our point of departure when starting our struggle for empowerment. As of today, there is advancement of women in national parliaments and local levels, although through quota and not naturally through democratic awareness. Women continue to be under-represented in governments and decision-making levels. It is disappointing to notice that women have been almost missing in the formal peace processes that ended wars and established peace in the Western Balkans region. Transitional justice and international justice remains slow, because one



of the most painful issues, women raped during wars, remains yet hidden while punishment of perpetrators remains more as a resentment than a hope. Despite the fact that women are involved and show an outstanding performance in helping peacebuilding, democratic governance, reconciliation and advancing women, peace and security agenda, their sufferings in war times and contributions in peace times are not yet fully recognized. In general, the state of play in gender equality and women's empowerment has marked more progress in legal and normative terms, whereas, practical implementation is far behind, mainly due to the known barriers in this process. Our dream of gender inclusive peace and democratic governance is far from coming true.

In 2020, we will mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) and also the 5-year milestone towards achieving the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On the background of this momentum, there is an urgent need to assess current challenges that affect the implementation of these important international platforms for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular in the Western Balkans region.

The Western Balkans remain facing an unfinished peace, fragile democracy, fragile security, corruption, and unemployment. The issue of brain drain is affecting the entire region which is a loss of capacities, making it difficult to plan and work for development and prosperity. Inequalities continue in many areas, especially worrisome is gender inequality. Moreover, delays in European and Euro-Atlantic integration of all six Western Balkan countries have put the region in crossroad. Overcoming these challenges requires activating all human capacities, and women offer a strategic asset which national and international authorities should be aware of.

Regional Women's Lobby in South East Europe (RWLSEE) as a unique regional peacebuilding organization considers that women's empowerment and gender equality help create a foundation for long-term growth and a peaceful, just and inclusive societies. We think that time has come for power to women and strive to ensure gender power balance, where women and men decides equally and together for a safe future. As the organization who gathers women leaders in politics and civil society from our focus countries, Kosovo, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, we strongly believe and work for women's empowerment and gender equality, the European and Euro-Atlantic future, for a peaceful, democratic, stable and prosperous countries and the region.

To respond to the lack of real progress on the empowerment of women and to the persistent instability in the region and on the occasion of relevant anniversaries - 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 - **the RWLSEE and UN Women, with support of Swedish Government, will organize the International Conference on Beijing+25 Regional review for Western Balkans**, aligned to the 2030 Agenda and UN Women Generation Equality.

2. Main issues to be addressed

In this regard, RWLSEE considers that some of the main issues that requires necessary steps to be taken are:

- **Ensuring equal participation of women in government and decision making, at both national and local levels, which leads to a sound and good governance free of corruption, for the interest of the citizens.** Women must play a key role in the process of deciding for the future built on gender inclusive democratic governance and peacebuilding for the benefit of citizens. Ensuring gender equality in decision-making requires a political will and legal guarantees for the implementation. The contribution of women to make changes from war to peace in our countries and entire Balkans has to be fully recognized. These women, as leaders and activists, with their work demonstrated leadership for change. They were and are agents of change for a better future.

- **Consolidating the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, negotiating tables, mediation and security processes which can result in more peace, stability and prosperity.** Women must play a key role in the process of deciding on peace and implementing peace at national, local and international levels, because only gender inclusive peace can be sustainable. The dramatic underrepresentation in peace making, peace negotiations and in peacebuilding cannot be tolerated any longer. A striking statistic that 2% of women currently serve as mediators, so many years after the adoption of the resolution 1325, speaks for itself. The striking absence of women from formal peace negotiations reveals a troubling gap between the aspirations and the reality of peace processes.

- **Ensuring equal access to justice and transitional justice for women leads to sustainable peace and reconciliation, much needed in the post-conflict settings.** The issue of equal access to justice for women as most vulnerable category remains worrisome. There is a necessity to establish accountable and gender inclusive justice institutions and gain confidence in them, consolidate transitional justice to redressing the victims that recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings, establish international justice for women victims of conflict related sexual violence and, applying facilitation/mediation as a tool to enhance women's equal access to justice. National authorities must do much more in this direction while being committed to bring to an end discrimination and domestic and other violence against women. Access to justice is a basic human right prescribed by numerous UN and EU human rights instruments. It leads to a just and inclusive society.

3. Aim and objectives of the International Conference

The aim of the International Conference is to review, discuss key trends and provide recommendations for closing the gap in gender equality in our region and beyond. Focus will be on the areas of decision-making, peacebuilding, security and justice in the Western Balkans, where women face specific challenges given the specific post-conflict context of our region.

The International Conference has the following **objectives**:

- **To bring together women leaders from politics, civil society and experts to discuss achievements and challenges of women in the post-conflict context with regard to**



implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform on the areas of women, peace and security and the UNSC Resolution 1325. The discussions will take stock on the situation of women's status in 25 years after the Beijing Conference, based on analyses done to the Beijing +25 National Reports of seven focus countries of the RWLSEE. The findings of the discussions are expected to generate recommendations for closing the gap in gender equality in the region of Western Balkans, providing a regional input for the upcoming Beijing+25 Platform for Action.

• **To develop a final document – Beijing+25 Regional Report and Recommendations for Western Balkans** - describing key region-specific achievements, gaps and challenges with regards to implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the area of women, peace and security and suggesting recommendations to the states for the way forward towards the gender equality, aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and UN Women Generation Equality

4. Methodology and Participants

The International Conference will bring together up to 50 participants representing:

- Women leaders in politics and civil society, parliaments, governments, local governments, national and international experts on gender equality and women's empowerment, RWLSEE Steering Committee and all members from the RWLSEE focus countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
- Representatives of UN Women, Embassy of Sweden, other UN agencies and international organizations

The discussion in plenary sessions and in the working groups will focus on the following thematic areas:

Thematic area 1: Women equal participation in decision-making and government

Thematic area 2: Women equal participation in peacebuilding, reconciliation and security processes

Thematic area 3: Equal access to justice, transitional justice and international justice for women

5. Place and date of the event

In Skopje, North Macedonia - Hotel Holiday Inn – on 26 November 2019