

The four worldwide conferences. Development and objectives

United Nations Charter signed on 1945ⁱ, and Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved on 1948, are the first international juridical instruments that contain in a very clear language, equal opportunities between human without any exclusion such as sex as a discrimination cause.

From this very moment, we may say that United Nations turn into the encourage force which promote juridical instruments taking in account equal rights for men and women.

For this reason, the Juridical and Social Women Condition Commission is created in 1946, with the aim of preparing reports on women rights promotion in politics, economy, education and social life.

In 1967 the General Assembly of United Nations adopts the Declaration on elimination of any discrimination against women and a little later in 1975 the International Women Year is declared. This year, the Worldwide Women Conference is celebrated in Mexico, followed by the Copenhagen Conference in 1980 and by the ones in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

The first Worldwide Conference about women juridical and social condition was celebrated in Mexico in 1975 to make it clash with Women International Year. It was necessary to elaborate future objectives which guided the action towards the ending of women discrimination and its social advance.

3 priority objectives were identified:

1. Total equality of gender and the elimination of discrimination for gender reasons
2. Total women participation in development
3. A bigger contribution of women to world peace.

The Conference approved an action plan which set the guidelines for governments and all the international community for the next ten years; this period was named Women United Nations Decade (1975/1985).

The action plan established a series of goals to be reached in 1980 and which had as main objectives to assure women their equal access to education, work, political participation, health, housing, family planning and feeding.

In 1975 an inflexion point is set in what is considered women role; for the first time they are not considered in an international context as mere receptors of the different policies, but to be considered as a main their implication in gender equality at the same level as men, including their participation on development processes.

This change on women role is evident during the conference celebration with a great participation of women themselves on the discussions.

It is interesting to underline that from 133 State delegations, all of them were represented by women.

It is in this first conference where for the first time a Forum of Non Governmental Organizations is set down. It was developed at the same time as the conference, a fact that has been repeated the following Women World Conferences.

In Mexico, participation number reached 4.000. In this Forum and in the next ones, a severe debate will be developed both at internal (between organizations) and external level (United Nations and Countries).

The second World Conference on Women Social and Juridical Condition was celebrated in Copenhagen in 1980.

In this conference, a reflexion on the level of compliance of the first conference guidelines is started to be done.

It is important to bring out that in 1979 the United Nations General Assembly approves a Convention on elimination of any way of discrimination against womenⁱⁱ.

This Convention has been a powerful instrument in the path of equal opportunities between men and women. In fact it is considered as Women Human Rights Letter, and comprises 165 countries that have ratified it and they are obliged to present a report on the situation and to be evaluated every 4 years.

However, in Copenhagen it was observed that a gap between legal equality and the real consecution of legal rights was beginning to emerge.

It is precisely from this conference that we start to talk about equality and not only from a legal point of view but also from these points of view: the exercise of rights, equality in terms of women participation, real opportunities between women and men and not only as legal recognition.

This second conference established three main action spheres:

1. Equality in access to education
2. Equality of opportunities in employment.
3. Health attention for women

The conference was closed with an action programme which contemplates the reasons that caused a break between recognised equality and real execution of women rights.

It underlined the following:

- ✓ Lack of men implication and participation in women equality process.
- ✓ Insufficient political will from state members.

- ✓ Lack of recognition of women contribution to society
- ✓ Lack of women in decision power employments
- ✓ Lack of support social services
- ✓ Lack of financing
- ✓ Few sensitization between women themselves

Emphasis was made to solve these problems and to finish with the stereotyped vision both feminine and masculine, by guaranteeing women right to property and goods and children control.

The Third Worldwide Women Conference was celebrated in Nairobi in 1985. It was seen as an evaluation of the Women Decade (1975-1985)

157 countries participated and around 15000 representatives of non governmental organisations were met on the parallel Forum. In this conference emerged a great change of perspective; it is no longer considered women access to any aspect of life as a right, but also as a need of every society to count on the richness of women participation.

Three types of measures are taken:

- Law measures
- Measures to reach equality in social participation.
- Measures to reach equality in political participation and in decision making processes.

Governments are urged to establish action lines according their priorities, to reach equality between men and women, but insisting in the fact that equality must impregnate every social, political and labour life spheres.

The Fourth Worldwide Women Conference was celebrated in Beijing in 1995. It is the conference that caused the greatest impact of all conferences until that date; from the participation point of view (it counted on representations of 189 governments and a participation of 35.000 people in the parallel Non Governmental Organizations Forum) to the women and men equality focus.

It is true that, years before, equality as a greater implication and participation, had already began to be discussed. However, it is in Beijing when this process truly took place and when it starts to talk about not only about women but gender concept.

Gender concept establishes women and men relationships from a cultural, historical and social perspective. It implies a new vision taking in account social attributed roles for men and women in politics, family, institutions and in every human relations aspects.

In Beijing it was unanimously approved a Declaration ⁱⁱⁱ and an Action Platform. I would love to stop briefly in some points of the Declaration that I consider of vital importance:

In the first place, women diversity is recognized; the generic concept of women is left and women diversity is emphasized, as well as the different circumstances where they develop.

All women work on the matter until now it is also recognized. This is very important as a visibility and recognition of the work that has been done all the way in history.

It is affirmed as a conviction that women rights are human rights and it is settled down the total participation of women in equal conditions in every sphere of society as a fundamental condition to reach equality, development and peace.

It is discussed on girls and women rights and the importance to harness their capacity of guarantee its total participation, in equal conditions, in building a better world for everybody and in promoting their role in development process. Finally, it is underlined the importance of preventing and eliminating every violence manifestation against women and girls.

At the same time, the Action Platform in Beijing established the following strategic objectives:

1. Women and poverty
2. Education and women capability
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflicts
6. Economy and women
7. Women in power execution and decision making processes
8. Institutional mechanisms for women improvement
9. Women human rights
10. Women and mass media
11. Women and Environment
12. Girls

As it can be observed, Beijing means a real inflexion point in the fight for equality in the international frame.

What it is interesting to remark is the great implication required from the States Platform so that equality between men and women becomes a reality.

Two concepts rose strongly at international scenery: gender concept (explained before) and mainstreaming or gender transversal focus.

This implies rethink social, economic, labour and family life, health and of course power and politics, from gender perspective, analyzing and valuing the different men and women implications in any aspect of human development

Far beyond from Beijing

United Nations General Assembly urged Women Juridical and Social Commission to integrate in their action plans a pursuit of the Forth Women Worldwide Conference, paying attention to the 12 critic areas which had been considered as essential at the Conference.

Both in 2000^{iv} and 2005^v United Nations General Assembly has organised extraordinary meetings to evaluate the indicated objectives at Beijing Platform and to value the progress on equality between men and women.

In both meetings validity of Beijing Action Platform is reaffirmed, as well as the need to continue advancing to reach their objectives.

United Nations System and International and National Organisations are urged to intensify their contributions for the implementation of the Action Platform. This implementation is essential to reach development objectives included in the Millennium Objectives^{vi}.

ⁱ United Nations Letter, Art. 1 p. 3; art. 13 p. 1-b.

ⁱⁱ CEDAW defines in its first article discrimination: “every distinction, exclusion or reduce base don sex which has as object or result the cancellation of recognition, joy or exercise by women, beyond her civil situation, taking in account equality between men and women, of human rights and fundamental liberties in political, economic, social, cultural or civil or wherever sphere”

ⁱⁱⁱ Beijing Declaration, Women Fourth Worldwide Conference Report. United Nation Publication.

^{iv} New York, 9th June 2000. “ Women in 2000: gender equality, development and peace in XXI century””.

^v New York, 5th March 2005. Exam and Evaluation of the decade. “Beijing 10 years later. Reaching gender equality, development and peace”.

^{vi} Millennium Declaration. Resolution 55/2 from United Nations General Assembly.