UN Women launches Beijing+20 campaign

UN Women calls on global citizens to bring gender equality into focus

Launches Beijing+20 Campaign:
Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it!

23 May, New York: UN Women launched a major campaign on 22nd May, in the lead-up to the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the historic Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. A year of activities around the world will aim to mobilize governments and citizens alike to picture a world where gender equality is a reality and to join a global conversation on empowering women to empower humanity.

Events will focus on achievements and gaps in gender equality and women’s empowerment since 189 governments adopted the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This visionary blueprint paves the way for women’s full and equal participation in all spheres of life and decision-making.

“The Beijing Platform for Action is an unfulfilled promise to women and girls,” says UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. “Our goal is straightforward: renewed commitment, strengthened action and increased resources to realize gender equality, women’s empowerment and the human rights of women and girls.”

The Beijing Women’s Conference drew an unprecedented 17,000 participants while 30,000 representatives attended the NGO Forum. Next year, in 2015, the United Nations will assess progress on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the past 20 years, based on national reports currently being prepared by UN Member States.

The campaign kicked off with an all-day Tweetathon spanning the globe. Participating groups included the UN, Lean In, the World YWCA, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, Half the Sky, the European Women’s Lobby, the Women’s Media Centre, Devex and other regional and national experts.
UN Women unveiled a global information hub featuring diverse voices, testimonies of personal experiences and achievement, celebrity champions and a calendar to track Beijing+20 events. There are many women from South Asia who have been profiled on this global information hub. For example, internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, writer, actor and activist, Mallika Sarabhai who calls herself a "communicator". Through her art and activism, and in her message for #Beijing20, she stresses that it's time to break the silence about violence against women, and teach men that to be gentle and vulnerable is manly.

Also in the spotlight is Vandana Bahadur Maida from Madhya Pradesh. She was elected Head of the village council, and became the first woman Sarpanch. Her election was path-breaking for the village and also for Vandana's family—as she superseded her own husband who used to be a member of the village council but never the elected leader.

From the landlocked Himalayan nation of Bhutan, UN Women also profiled Namgay Peldon who was elected the first women Gup, the block leader, as the nation voted for the first time in 2008.

In her blog, Ranjana Kumari, who is the Director of the Centre for Social Research, recollects meeting global activists in Beijing 1995. In months to come, more women achievers and activists from India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka will be showcased on this information hub.

The HeforShe web platform will spotlight prominent men standing up to end violence against women and advance equality. One of them is Dinesh Karthik who is one of India's finest cricketers and a sports icon. At 29, he is also a champion for women and girls' empowerment. He is a #HeForShe advocate and is calling upon men and boys everywhere to take action to end violence against women and girls.

UN Women will support engagement through its network of country offices and release an interactive Facebook app, “Close the Gap”. In India, UN Women has formed a Civil Society Working Group to plan for national activities for Beijing+20. UN Women is also working closely with UN agencies, young students and the private sector to make this campaign a success.

“This anniversary takes place at an historic moment,” stresses UN Women’s Mlambo-Ngucka, “as the nations of the world are coming together to accelerate progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and define a new global development framework. We must seize this once-in-a-generation opportunity to position gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment at the centre of the global agenda and make it a reality.”

Major campaign events are being planned around the world. This June, tens of thousands of people will gather in Sweden to advocate for the protection of the human rights of women and girls. In September, at the Climate Summit in New York, a special event will be held with women heads of State and activists. In India in November, men and boys will make a show of force for gender equality.

The formal commemoration of the 20th anniversary will take place during
the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and International Women's Day 2015 will be dedicated to Beijing+20. A high-level commitment meeting is expected in September 2015.

During the past two decades much progress has been made in women’s legal rights, educational achievements, and participation in public life. But much still remains to be done to address gender wage gaps and unequal opportunities, low representation of women in leadership in public office and the private sector, child marriage, rampant violence and other violations against women and girls.

“Today I call on everyone to be part of the solution,” said Ms Mlambo-Ngcuka. “Picture It! Together we can realize the promise of Beijing: equality between women and men.”