



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Integrating gender perspective and making historically successful communities inclusive in the debate on integrating gender perspectives**

Several articles in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, call upon integrating gender perspectives in all spheres of policy, law, management, disaster relief etc. Much has been achieved but there are still many gaps and many regions where this remains elusive. There are genuine gaps due to failure to see the areas where gender perspective has still not been considered. But there is also resistance. This resistance is partly due to misogynist attitudes but also cultural in some cases where traditional approaches are refusing to give way.

One dimension in the integrating gender perspective that has been missing in the Beijing Declaration and subsequent deliberations is a willingness to learn from communities and traditions where the integration of gender perspective has been an integral part of their cultures and character.

It should not be assumed that the whole world practiced gender discrimination, misogyny or was male dominated. There are communities where women had equal role or greater decision making roles than men. There are many communities in which women had a strong voice in decision making and gender perspectives were integral in them.

CSW could highlight these communities and ask them to give their wisdom to the world, on how they managed to avoid the discriminatory practices that have been prevalent in many regions of the world and what were the philosophical or belief concepts that ensured integration of gender perspectives.

There are many indigenous people who have not had gender discrimination or inequalities. There are other communities that also have long history of integrating gender perspectives in their community practices, functions, culture and decisions. It will be great to hear from them to understand what worked for them. That knowledge will help to compliment current approaches and help to understand how to fill the gaps where they exist.

Colonialism disrupted and judged many communities that had no inequality as being led by weaker gender. Where colonialism was dominant, it intervened by restructuring societies and tried to make them into the European image of male dominated and male orientated society. Colonialism had a negative effect on these communities as women were deprived of independent financial means and routes to power and in many cases equal place in the seats of power. After decolonisation, some communities are recovering their pre colonial orientation and reinstating the equal role of women.

We can bring you the example of the Sikhs. The Sikhs have had 10 Gurus in succession between 1569 and 1708. Their teachings are in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the current Guru of the Sikhs in textual form. The first Guru brushed away gender inequality and restructured society without any attacking any previous baggage or without getting into a debate with social norms. Instead he dismissed the existing attitudes by saying, 'Of woman Kings and paupers are born, how can she be inferior?' Guru Nanak taught the creator is also all of the creation. Thus all genders and all species are simply manifestation of the One. Therefore there cannot be discrimination as effectively the person discriminating is discriminating another form of the creator.

During the period of the Gurus, nearly 40 per cent of priests were women. Sikh women have led armies, political office and even led negotiations with new colonising powers. It was under colonialism that women lost their position and power.

When Sikhs started recovering their strength back, the first thing that was done was to ensure that 35 per cent of representation in the committee running historic Gurdwaras, were given to women. A lot has happened since then. There have been women heads of Gurdwaras, of committees managing Sri Darbar sahib (Golden temple) and even Chief Ministers in Punjab where most Sikhs live.

There are similar stories in other parts of the world. It is our suggestion that CSW bring these pre modern successful examples to the conference and hear what made them avoid inequalities and gender discriminations.

It is important that the gender perspective is introduced in all aspects of modern life including disasters, healthcare and town planning.

Referring to the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, we note several articles that require Governments and United Nations to integrate gender perspectives in several areas of policy, law and programmes.

We feel what may be missing is the need to encourage communities as civil society to be encouraged to integrate gender perspectives in their community institutions, decision making and programmes too. After all Governments can only do so much. States are made by people who are composed of communities, societies, faiths and other belief systems. For the State to successfully integrate gender perspectives it is important to have the full co-operation of the people. Time and again it becomes evident that if the attitudes of people does not change, then States can impose policies but they become unworkable. The co-operation of people is necessary. In fact a community willing to see issues from many aspects and angles, especially gender perspectives, can be a tremendous asset to a State trying to fulfil its influencing role in gender parity and gender integration.

In the part on Strategic Objectives and Actions (Beijing Declaration), article 60 calls for action by Governments as well as non Governmental Organizations, there are several calls for action. However we feel NGOs are best strengthened by providing them to the resources to ensure integration of gender perspectives in Government policies. Communities, should also be considered in future as fundamental units in a countries to ensure this both within their institutions and in State institutions.

We fully agree with Article 57 in this section that the ‘The success of policies and measures aimed at supporting or strengthening the promotion of gender equality and the improvement of the status of women should be based on the integration of the gender perspective in general policies relating to all spheres of society as well as the implementation of positive measures with adequate institutional and financial support at all levels.’ To ensure this, the co-operation of communities is essential. States should adopt policies that nudge communities towards incorporating gender perspectives in their culture and then demand that of the State.

We particularly endorse Article 244 ( c ) Develop a gender perspective on all issues of concern to communities, consumers and civil society. We request CSW to bring in communities, faiths, Beliefs, Dharams and religions into the debate. We believe that much can be achieved by bringing various sections of civil society, incorporate best practices, listen to their reservations and learn from each other particularly from communities that have successfully avoided gender discrimination historically and have incorporated gender perspectives in all walks of their community life. This will be an acknowledgement that the problems were not necessarily universal. We believe those societies that have historically avoided gender discrimination will feel respected if their unique perspectives are heard as examples in this international platform and they will add positively to the Platform of Action.