



**THE CONTRACT WITH
WOMEN OF THE USA®
STATE LEGISLATORS INITIATIVE
1996-2011**

**Promoting Women's Human Rights
Through Enlightened Public Policy**

**CENTER FOR WOMEN POLICY STUDIES
JUNE 2011**

DEDICATION

— In Honor and Memory of Bella Abzug

She was a founding mother of the women's movement, a visionary and outspoken feminist, a politician whose roots were in peace and social justice, an irrepressible advocate for global feminism, a winner of the Center's *Jessie Bernard Wise Women* award in 1995, a sister, a friend — Bella.

When Bella Abzug died on March 31, 1998, the world's women mourned. Because Bella used her celebrity to improve the lives of women and to protect human rights, peace, and the environment. Because Bella fearlessly challenged and confronted entrenched political interests and patriarchal institutions. Because Bella gave us courage by her example — speaking out and standing firm. Because Bella never compromised her feminist vision and principles — even when others were willing to do so in the face of the right wing assault.

And Bella was never silent. "Never hesitate to tell the truth. Never give in and never give up," she told us.

Born in 1920, the year that women in the United States finally won the right to vote, Bella helped to change the political landscape for US women. More than 20 years before the 1992 "Year of the Women" brought record numbers of women to Congress, Bella, then 50 years old, ran for the US House of Representatives — and won.

Her campaign slogan — "This woman's place is in the House — the House of Representatives" — became an indelible part of the political landscape. And her effectiveness and principled positions set the standard for a later generation of women political leaders.

As a Congresswoman, Bella championed the *Equal Rights Amendment*, abortion rights, and child care legislation. When the **Center for Women Policy Studies** conducted groundbreaking research on sex discrimination in the granting of credit in 1972-1973, Bella used the findings in the fight for passage of the *Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974*, which made it illegal to deny credit on the basis of sex. She introduced the first civil rights bills for lesbians and gays — among many other pieces of cutting edge legislation.

Bella was everywhere in the women's movement — a founder of the **National Women's Political Caucus**, **Women's Strike for Peace**, **Women U.S.A.**, and the **Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)**. As a founder and leader of global women's caucuses, she helped bring together women's NGOs from around the world to take a stand for women's rights at United Nations conferences.

Bella inspired the **Contract with Women of the USA®** and she was our partner in this work until her final days. Together with Bella and our sisters at WEDO, we designed the **Contract with Women of the USA®** as a strategy to bring home to the women of the United States the promises of the Platform for Action adopted at the **United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women** in 1995 in Beijing.

Today, the dozen principles in the **Contract with Women of the USA®** form the basis of the Center's ongoing policy and advocacy work for our network of women state legislators in all 50 states and the District of Columbia — and for our growing network of women Members of Parliament and Ministers from around the world — who share our mission to promote women's human rights through enlightened public policy.

The Center carries on Bella's tradition of outspoken multiethnic and multicultural feminism in this second decade of the 21st century. We count ourselves among the global network of women's human rights organizations that will "never give in and never give up," as Bella said.

Her inspiration, her sisterhood, and her friendship — these were great gifts that we will always cherish. We carry her legacy with us at the Center through our outspoken advocacy for women's human rights and through our work to implement the principles of the **Contract with Women of the USA®**. When we feel discouraged and disheartened, we hear her voice in our hearts and are strengthened.

We dedicate this report to the memory of our sister and friend, Bella Abzug.

THE FOUNDING OF THE CONTRACT WITH WOMEN OF THE USA®

The Beginning: The 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a **Platform for Action**, endorsed by 189 governments, that remains a powerful agenda for women’s equality, human rights, and empowerment worldwide. In the words of Bella Abzug: “It was in Beijing that we really gave birth to a stronger and newer global movement for democracy. **The Beijing Platform for Action** is the strongest statement, though not perfect, of consensus on women’s equality, empowerment, and justice ever produced by governments.”

The **Beijing Platform for Action** addressed 12 key areas for change — from poverty alleviation to equal education to women’s health to economic equality to ending violence against women. The Platform also confronted the crises facing women in armed conflict and the need for women to be at the peace table and to be in power and decision making roles in every sphere of government. The Platform urged creation of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and pressed for the promotion of the human rights of women — especially through implementation of such human rights instruments as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. The Platform spoke to the role of women in the media, the impact of environmental degradation on women and the need for women’s participation in environmental decision making. And the Platform singled out the urgency of addressing the needs of the girl child in all of these arenas and more (see Appendix for *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Summary)*).

As Bella declared in Beijing: “We have a contract here — that’s what we call the **Platform for Action from the Beijing conference — a contract with the world’s women. It may not be legally binding, but I believe it is politically binding.**”

The Inspiration: At the **Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)** Fourth National Forum for Women State Legislators in San Diego in November 1995, Bella Abzug gave a keynote address about the Beijing Conference and its Platform for Action — and Center President Leslie Wolfe and Vice President Jennifer Tucker convened an informal meeting with several women state legislators from throughout the USA to discuss strategies to respond to anti-woman policies generated by the right wing in their states and to promote a multiethnic feminist policy agenda. These two events provided the initial impetus for creation of the **Contract with Women of the USA®** and pointed the way to a new approach to Beijing implementation.

The Partnership: Together, the Center and the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) took steps to make this vision a reality in the United States. We “translated” the **Beijing Platform for Action** into US relevant terms — and the **Contract with Women of the USA®** was born. In fact, the **Contract with Women of the USA®** includes enduring principles that have long guided WEDO’s and the Center’s work — empowerment of women as decision makers, ending the burden of poverty, ensuring access to quality health care, guaranteeing women’s sexual and reproductive rights, ensuring women’s workplace rights, promoting educational equity, and ending violence against women.

The **Contract with Women of the USA®** “is a blueprint for state legislators to develop policies and programs that enable women and girls to achieve their full potential and attain genuine equality,” noted the Center’s President, Leslie R. Wolfe (see Appendix for the text of the **Contract with Women of the USA®**).

The New Network: Since 1996, the Center’s “niche” in post-Beijing implementation activities in the United States has been to build a network of women state legislators in all 50 states who endorse the **Contract with Women of the USA®** and work to implement its principles — both in their state Legislatures and in their roles as community leaders. State legislators also are effective federal policy advocates — and influencers.

Also in 1996, an era of devolution of many federal responsibilities to the states began and the policy and advocacy leadership of women state legislators therefore was especially crucial to protect and expand women’s human rights. Today, in an era of increasing economic insecurity and policies that are hostile to women’s human rights in many states, the leadership of the Center’s network of women state legislators is more important than ever.

We have been honored and gratified by the active engagement of a powerful group of state legislators, who have worked closely with the Center since the beginning — and who led the way in the launch of the **Contract with Women of the USA®** in 1996.

Contract with Women of the USA® Launch Day — International Women’s Day 1996: On March 8, 1996, the Center and WEDO officially announced the creation of the **Contract with Women of the USA®**. At the same time, women’s legislative caucuses in six states — **Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, and New York** — hosted media events to publicly pledge their support for the **Contract with Women of the USA®** and to announce their own **Contracts** with the women of their states. These six states were followed on April 15 by **Florida and Oregon**, where women legislators announced their state **Contracts** at a series of press events.

In **Arizona**, Representatives Marion Pickens and Sue Lyons, Senator Ruth Solomon, Councilmember Carol Smith, and members of the Arizona delegation to Beijing launched the **Contract with the Women of Arizona**.

California Assemblymember Sheila Kuehl and 13 state legislators announced the **Contract with California’s Women**. In **Illinois**, Representative Sara Feigenholtz introduced a resolution supporting the **Contract with Women of the USA®**, with Representatives Barbara Flynn Currie, Carol Ronen, and Jan Schakowsky.

More than 25 **Maryland** women legislators, led by Delegate Sue Hecht and Senator Jennie Forehand, announced the **Pledge to Maryland Women**, introduced as a resolution. The **Minnesota** Democratic Farmer Labor (DFL) Women’s Caucus announced the **Covenant with Minnesota Women**, led by Senators Sandra Pappas, Janet Johnson, Jane Ranum, Ellen Anderson, and Pat Piper and Representatives Phyllis Kahn and Mary Jo McGuire. In **New York**, the Legislative Women’s Caucus — led by Assemblymember Joan Christensen — Chair of the Assembly Task Force on Women’s Issues and the Legislative Women’s Caucus, and Senator Suzi Oppenheimer — Chair of the Senate Democratic Task Force on Women’s Issues — announced **Women 2000: Putting Women on the Public Policy Agenda**, a five year plan to integrate women’s issues into the state’s public policy agenda.

Finally, the **Florida** House Women’s Caucus endorsed the **Contract with Women of the USA®** at a press conference in the State Capitol, led by Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz with other state legislators and community leaders. And **Oregon** Representative Kitty Piercy and eight other legislators brought together representatives of a broad range of women’s, labor, environmental, and community groups to voice their support of the **Contract with Women of the USA®**.

Women state legislators nationwide moved quickly to join the new national **Contract with Women of the USA®** network. On Women’s Equality Day, August 26, 1996 — the 76th anniversary of women’s suffrage — the Center announced the charter members of the **Contract with Women of the USA® National**

Honor Roll of State Legislators, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, who publicly endorsed the **Contract with Women of the USA®**.

From that day to this, state legislators from every state in the Union have endorsed the **Contract with Women of the USA®** and thereby joined the *National Honor Roll*. The *Honor Roll* membership increases with every election cycle (go to www.centerwomenpolicy.org for the updated list of current and alumnae members of the *National Honor Roll of State Legislators*).

The Contract with Women of the USA® Network: The Center's **Contract with Women of the USA®** Network is unique among networks and coalitions of state legislators in its commitment to a very specific women's human rights framework — derived from the **Beijing Platform for Action** — and built on a commitment to a multiethnic feminist policy agenda that respects and protects women's reproductive rights. The women state legislators (and many men) who are actively engaged with the Center regularly take leadership on legislative and policy initiatives to implement the principles embodied in the **Contract with Women of the USA®** — and to stand up for women's human rights in their Legislatures, in their own districts, and in the federal policy arena.

To encourage and expand their efforts, the Center serves as their “national staff” on all women's human rights policy issues — producing policy-relevant reports and other materials, providing individualized technical assistance and strategic advice on a full range of policy issues, and conducting special programs to educate and activate state legislators on critical women's human rights issues that require state-level action and leadership.

National Programs for Women State Legislators: The Center's major programs for state legislators address several of the Center's longtime “signature issues.” The programs are many and various and are updated

annually to ensure relevance to the needs of state legislators. While the Center's programs address the needs of all women, our focus is on the women who experience multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion and whose self-defined needs are often ignored but are at the heart of all of the Center's work: women of color, low income women of all races/ethnicities, and women with disabilities.

***Foreign Policy Institute for State Legislators:** The Center launched the *Foreign Policy Institute* in 2001 to educate state legislators on the impact of US foreign policy on women worldwide. The *Institute* was the first program in the United States to bring women state-level policy makers into the world of foreign policy and to give them a women's human rights analysis and perspective on the full range of foreign policy and development assistance issues.

Each year, the Center selected a new group of women state legislators to participate in the weeklong *Foreign Policy Institute*. The *Institute's* intensive curriculum was presented by a faculty of foreign policy and foreign assistance experts and women's human rights leaders — from national and international women's human rights organizations, academia, and media. Faculty members also included women leaders from around the world — elected officials, heads of women's organizations, and Ambassadors to the United States. *Foreign Policy Institute* participants also met with senior officials of the United Nations, the US Department of State, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and Members of Congress.

Between 2001 and 2009, the *Foreign Policy Institute for State Legislators* graduated a total of 110 state legislators from 41 states. (Learn more about the *Foreign Policy Institute* and its graduates at www.centerwomenpolicy.org.)

***National Institute on State Policy on Trafficking of Women and Girls of US PACT (Policy Advocacy to Combat Trafficking):** The Center's leadership to combat trafficking

of women and girls into the United States is a crucial part of our advocacy for women's human rights. Each year, thousands of women and girls are trafficked into the United States and held in involuntary servitude and forced labor in multiple settings — including sweatshops, domestic servitude, farm labor and sexual exploitation.

As a major “destination” country for traffickers, the United States must take leadership through both federal and state government action in the struggle against trafficking. The Center believes that our Nation must always understand this crisis through a women's human rights lens — and shape policies that respond.

In many ways the Center's work on trafficking in the 21st century carries forward our founders' early policy leadership in the 1970s — which defined violence against women and girls as a public policy issue, at a time when it was considered to be a “personal” problem in the private sphere and not relevant to the public sphere.

Since 2001, the Center has been at the forefront — bringing the issue of international trafficking and its impact on the United States to the attention of state legislators and their constituents. Center leaders have traveled throughout the country to make presentations at conferences, conduct briefings for state legislators, and testify before state Legislatures — to define the issue in a women's human rights context and to demonstrate the importance of creating state anti-trafficking legislation to respond. For example, by the end of 2010, 43 states had enacted state laws making human trafficking a state felony offense.

The Center's *Resource Guide for State Legislators: Model Provisions for State Anti-Trafficking Laws* (2005) is unique in deriving its model legislative provisions not only from the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), as amended*, but also from state laws that have proven effective and from international human rights instruments. The *Resource Guide* and many other publications are

available at the Center's website at www.centerwomenpolicy.org.

The National Program for Reproductive Rights and HIV/AIDS Policy: Since 1989, when the Center launched **The Law and Pregnancy Program — Implementing Policies for Women's Reproductive Rights and Health**, we have developed policy recommendations on the “second generation” of complex reproductive rights issues for federal and state policy makers and advocates. We have focused on ensuring that women's reproductive rights are not restricted by state or federal legislative efforts to define a legal status for the embryo or fetus and that policy initiatives explicitly address the self-defined needs of women of color, women with disabilities, and low income women.

In recent years, for example, some state Legislatures have criminalized self-induced abortions and any “intentional or knowing act” that results in a miscarriage and expanded abortion reporting requirements to ask each woman such questions as “the reason for the abortion,” her marital status and level of education. Today, Legislatures nationwide are continuing this trend with even more draconian measures, making the Center's programs for legislators even more important.

The legislators who participated in our **2009 National Strategic Action Convening (SAC): A Framework for Health Care Reform** took immediate action to bring their voices — and the needs of their constituents — to the Congressional debate on health care reform. Together, they crafted a brief but powerful letter to the Members of the Senate and House Committees who were writing the then-developing health care reform legislation — to insist that Congress explicitly include all reproductive health care services among the law's “essential benefits.” More than 100 current and former state legislators signed the letter and continue to be powerful advocates for coverage of reproductive health services.

The 2011 National Strategic Action Convening (SAC) on Reproductive Rights

and Justice takes the next step in this effort — bringing together women state legislators from throughout the USA, to develop strategies and partnerships with national and local reproductive rights organizations to respond to the current legislative proposals in their states — and in Congress — that severely and dangerously restrict women’s right to safe abortion and even restrict access to contraception and other reproductive health services.

These state legislators remain on the “front lines” in the battle to preserve the protections guaranteed by *Roe v. Wade*.

The National Resource Center on Women and AIDS Policy: In 1987, the Center became the first national feminist organization to address the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and to bring the self-defined needs of women living with HIV/AIDS to the federal policy arena. The Center developed the first federal legislative proposals on woman-centered HIV/AIDS research, prevention and outreach and on research on the development of microbicides (a woman-controlled HIV prevention method).

Through the **National Resource Center on Women and AIDS Policy**, we have conducted a plethora of research, training, organizing, and empowerment activities for women living with HIV/AIDS, for policy makers, and for AIDS service providers. Our federally funded **Metro DC Collaborative for Women with HIV/AIDS** created a new model of leadership and advocacy by, for, and about women living with HIV/AIDS.

We have published more than two dozen reports on women and HIV/AIDS and produced a short film — “**Fighting for Our Lives**”: **Women Confronting AIDS** that features exemplary local HIV/AIDS outreach and advocacy programs for women of color, created and conducted by women of color from urban and rural communities throughout the United States.

In 2007, the Center launched the **Legislators Leadership Council on Women and HIV/AIDS** to address critical AIDS policy issues affecting women in each state. We organized the **Council**, with 32 charter members from 18 states, as the first national initiative on women and HIV/AIDS to be led by state legislators and to focus on each state’s role, in partnership with Congress and federal Departments, in creating woman-centered HIV/AIDS policies and programs — on access to care, HIV prevention, confidential HIV testing, and reproductive health, for example.

Participants in our 2011 **National Summit for State Legislators on Women and HIV/AIDS** include women state legislators from throughout the United States, with particular emphasis on states and regions in which the women’s HIV/AIDS epidemic is growing but under-resourced. The **Summit** is structured as a “working group” of legislators who will develop specific plans for their 2012 legislative sessions and will address the impact of HIV/AIDS on women in their own communities. The faculty of experts includes national leaders, federal officials, women living with HIV/AIDS and other women leaders of some of the many stellar women and HIV/AIDS programs in communities nationwide.

From Poverty to Self Sufficiency — State Legislators Leadership Program: For two decades, the Center has documented the role of postsecondary education in moving low income women toward economic independence and has consistently made the case for federal welfare policy that includes postsecondary education as an “allowable work activity.” However, the 1996 federal **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** severely restricted **TANF** recipients’ access to postsecondary education; as a result, thousands of **TANF** recipients were forced to drop out of their postsecondary education programs.

Since the passage of **TANF**, the Center has brought our original policy analyses and policy-relevant research to state legislators

— to demonstrate how even two years of postsecondary education is a proven successful route out of poverty and off welfare for many low income women.

The centerpiece of our 2011 program is the **National Seminar for State Legislators to Expand Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Low Income Women.**

We will engage a national network of women state legislators as leaders in policy reform and as colleagues and supporters of constituency groups — including both national and local women of color organizations and, especially,

organizations that represent the constituency of low income women and their families. The **Seminar** also will engage leaders in higher education, particularly from colleges that have taken the lead in educating low income women and men. Legislators will produce new strategies and plans to guide their efforts, and the Center's, in 2012.

The Center's website, at www.centerpolicy.org, provides more information on all Center programs and publications as well as updates on new Center programs and initiatives.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With the stellar leadership of our colleagues in the **Contract with Women of the USA® State Legislators Initiative**, the Center continues to pursue the legacy of Beijing — which inspires our continued policy leadership in the 21st century. In the post-Beijing era in the United States, the powerful message that “women’s rights are human rights” and the leadership of activist women policy makers at both the state and federal levels gives us hope that our forward march into an egalitarian future will not be halted.

Much remains to be done. State Legislatures must again be the “laboratory of democracy” — for women’s human rights — presenting forward thinking and progressive ideas to national leaders on every social policy issue.

Through their participation in the **Contract with Women of the USA® State Legislators Initiative**, members of our network will continue to take leadership in promoting state law and policy on a range of critical and difficult issues including: reproductive rights and justice, trafficking of women and girls, welfare reform and poverty alleviation, women and HIV/AIDS, violence against women and girls, for example.

Indeed, the United States Congress, to a greater extent than ever before in history, has relegated

the planning, implementation, and financing of services for low income women and families to state Legislatures and state budgets.

As a result, since the early days of the **Contract with Women of the USA®**, the attention and focus for many state legislators has been on the creation and expansion of state programs to ensure that low income women are not deprived of basic services that allow them to work and support themselves and their families — health care, family planning services, protection from domestic violence, affordable child care, access to postsecondary education, and the right to family and medical leave, for example.

State government jurisdiction over many of these issues has increased in the years since the launch of the **Contract With Women of the USA® State Legislators Initiative**. The devolution of control of health, reproductive rights, welfare, and social safety net policies and programs from the federal government to the individual states that emerged in the 1990s demands our increased state policy response. Today, state legislative leadership and vigilance is required in the implementation of the new health care reform law to ensure protection of women’s access to all forms of reproductive health care.

The legislators who participate in the **Contract with Women of the USA® State Legislators Initiative** are an invaluable group of leaders who have a major impact on state policy affecting women, who are the most likely to understand the need for programs that explicitly address women's needs, who see themselves as advocates for women, and who are able to persuade their colleagues to stand with them.

During the coming years, the **Center for Women Policy Studies** will continue to serve as the "national staff" to state legislators on these and other women's human rights policy issues. We will redouble our efforts to give voice to the **Contract with Women of the USA®'s** 12 principles for women's equality and human rights — in partnership with our colleagues in

state Legislatures in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the other United States territories. Together, we will make a difference for the women and girls of our Nation.

We conclude this report, therefore, as we began — with the words of Bella Abzug: "Women came to Beijing in unprecedented numbers because we believe we do make a difference. I believe each of us can and does make a difference. Here today it is important to know that the global women's movement is alive and well. . . . Never underestimate the importance of what we are doing here. Never hesitate to tell the truth. And never, ever give in or give up."

APPENDIX: THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION
(SUMMARY) AND THE CONTRACT WITH WOMEN OF THE USA®

BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (SUMMARY)¹

UNITED NATIONS FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, BEIJING, CHINA 1995

Since the United Nations held the first world conference on women 20 years ago (Mexico City, 1975), important progress has been made towards achieving equality between women and men. Women's access to education and proper health care has increased, their participation in the paid labor force has grown and legislation that promises equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted in more countries. As a result, important changes have occurred in the relationship between women and men.

Yet discrimination against women is still widespread. Violence against women remains a global phenomenon. Women's equal access to resources is still restricted and their opportunities for higher education and training are concentrated in limited fields. A "glass ceiling" continues to bar women's advancement in business, government and politics. Women are an overwhelming majority of the 1 billion people living in abject poverty and among illiterates. Decisions that affect women continue to be made largely by men.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously at the Fourth World Conference on Women (4-15 September 1995) by representatives from 189 countries, reflect a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere.

The Platform, divided into six chapters, identifies 12 "critical areas of concern" considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement. It defines strategic objectives

and spells out actions to be taken over the next five years by Governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector for the removal of the existing obstacles.

The Platform was further reinforced in the Beijing Declaration. It reaffirmed the commitment of Governments to eliminate discrimination against women and to remove all obstacles to equality. Governments also recognized the need to ensure a gender perspective in their policies and programmes.

MISSION STATEMENT & GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

Since the 1985 Nairobi Conference on Women, the world has experienced profound changes, with both positive and negative effects on women. A worldwide movement towards democratization has opened up the political process in many nations. The growing strength of women's organizations and feminist groups has become a driving force for change.

At the same time, widespread economic recession, political instability, heavy military spending, poorly designed structural adjustment programs, the servicing of the external debt burden and continuing environmental degradation have had a disproportionately negative impact on women.

The Platform for Action, an agenda for women's empowerment, seeks to reverse this trend. It seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle. It also calls for establishing the principle

¹This document is part of a brochure published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. Document code: DPI/1762/Wom--November 1995--50M and is available at the Division for the Advancement of Women's World Wide Web site at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>.

of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities.

The success of the Platform for Action will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels. It will also require adequate mobilization of resources at all levels as well as new and additional resources for the developing countries.

POVERTY

Today, more than 1 billion people live in extreme poverty; the overwhelming majority of them are women. In the past decade the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to the number of men, and the risk for falling into poverty is higher for women than for men. Poverty is particularly acute among women living in rural households.

Women are poorer because they have fewer economic opportunities and less autonomy than men. Their access to economic resources, education and training, and support services is limited. They also have very little participation in the way decisions are made. The rigidity of socially prescribed roles for women and the tendency to scale back social services have increased the burden of poverty on women.

The Platform recommends actions to:

- Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty;
- Revise laws and administrative practices in order to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources;
- Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions;
- Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving equality, development and peace. Though overall progress has been achieved in girls' enrollment at primary and secondary levels, girls in many countries still face discrimination due to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, lack of accessible schools, and inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials. Girls continue to be denied quality education, especially at higher levels and in science and technology.

Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth.

The Platform recommends actions to:

- Ensure equal access to education. Governments are to commit themselves, by the year 2000, to universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 percent of primary-school-age children.
- They also agree to close the gender gap in primary and secondary-school education by the year 2000, and to achieve universal education in all countries before the year 2015;
- Eradicate illiteracy among women. Governments are to reduce the female illiteracy rate at least to half its 1990 level;
- Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education;
- Develop non-discriminatory education and training;
- Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms;
- Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

HEALTH

Women's health involves their emotional, social and physical well-being. It is determined by the social, political and economic context of their lives, as well as by biology. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is vital for the life and well-being of women. It is also crucial to their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life. This right must be secured throughout their whole life cycle in equality with men.

The Platform defines reproductive health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and sexual health whose purpose is the enhancement of life and personal relations. Equal relationships between men and women in matters of sexual relations and reproduction require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility. The Platform recognizes that reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic human rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly how many children they want to have, and when. They also have the right to obtain information and make decisions on reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

The Platform recommends actions to:

- Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services;
- Reduce maternal mortality by at least 50 per cent of the 1990 levels by the year 2000 and a further one half by the year 2015;
- Encourage both women and men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behavior;
- Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues;
- Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.

VIOLENCE

In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture, in both public and private life. They often face rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation in the workplace. They are particularly vulnerable to systematic violence during war. Sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, sterilization and forced abortion, prenatal sex selection and female infanticide are also acts of violence. All such acts of violence violate and impair or nullify women's enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such groups of women as migrant workers require special attention because they are particularly vulnerable to violence.

Lack of preventive and protective laws, and lack of access or ineffective enforcement by public authorities of such laws where they exist, only perpetuate and increase violence against women.

The Platform recommends actions to:

- Adopt and implement legislation to end violence against women;
- Work actively to ratify and implement all international agreements related to violence against women, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Adopt new laws and enforce existing ones to punish members of security forces and police or any other State agents for acts of violence against women;
- Set up shelters, provide legal aid and other services for girls and women at risk, and provide counseling and rehabilitation for perpetrators of violence against women;
- Step up national and international cooperation to dismantle networks engaged in trafficking in women.

ARMED CONFLICT

Peace is a prerequisite for the attainment of equality between women and men. Unfortunately, armed and other types of conflict still persist in many parts of the world. Aggression, foreign occupation and ethnic and other conflicts are an ongoing reality affecting women and men in nearly every region, aided by excessive military expenditures and the arms trade.

Though women rarely have any role in the decisions leading to armed conflicts, they work to preserve social order in the midst of the conflicts. They also make an important contribution as peace educators and resolvers of conflicts.

The Platform recognizes that rape, which is common during armed conflicts, is a crime, and under certain circumstances is an act of genocide. It condemns “ethnic cleansing” as a strategy of war and rape as one of its consequences. Such practices must be stopped and their perpetrators punished, it asserts.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels;
- Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments;
- Work towards the universal ratification of the anti-mine Convention and Protocol by the year 2000;
- Recognize the important roles and contributions of women in peace movements throughout the world;
- Recognize the need to protect women living in situations of armed and other conflict or under foreign occupation, or who have become refugees or displaced.

ECONOMY

Women contribute significantly to economic life everywhere. Their share in the labour force continues to rise, they are becoming

more involved in micro-, small and medium enterprises and their income is becoming increasingly necessary to all households.

However, women are largely excluded from economic decision-making. They face low wages, poor working conditions and limited employment and professional opportunities. Though women contribute to development through paid as well as unpaid work, their unpaid work, such as domestic and community work, is not measured in quantitative terms and not valued in national accounts.

Discrimination in education and training, hiring, and remuneration and promotion, as well as inflexible working conditions, lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, contribute to restricted employment, economic and professional opportunities for women.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Promote women’s economic rights and independence, including access to employment and appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources;
- Facilitate women’s equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade;
- Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women;
- Strengthen women’s economic capacity and commercial networks;
- Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination;
- Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

DECISION-MAKING

Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple social justice or democracy. It is essential for achieving transparent and accountable government. It

will also provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society.

Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, women remain largely underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies or in reaching the target of having 30 per cent of decision-making positions held by women by 1995, as endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Council. They have achieved little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. Globally, only 10 per cent of legislative positions, and a lower percentage of ministerial positions, are held by women.

Similarly, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the arts, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions and policies.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making in governmental bodies and public administration entities, including the judiciary, international and non-governmental organizations, political parties and trade unions;
- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership positions.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

Most countries have established institutions for the advancement of women. These are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness. They are often marginalized in national government structures, without a clear mandate, and lack adequate staff and resources as well as support from national political leadership. At the regional and international levels, mechanisms and institutions for the advancement of women encounter similar problems.

Many organizations have developed methodologies for gender-based policy analysis. Unfortunately, they are applied either sporadically or not at all.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies; ensure that responsibility for the advancement of women is vested in the highest possible level of Government;
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programs and projects; ensure that before policy decisions are taken, an analysis of their impact on women and men is carried out.
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation; measure, in quantitative terms, unremunerated work that is outside national accounts.

HUMAN RIGHTS

All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Their full and equal enjoyment by women and girls is a priority for Governments and the United Nations and is essential for the advancement of women. Governments must not only refrain from violating the human rights of all women but work actively to promote and protect these rights.

Recognition of the importance of women's human rights is reflected in the fact that three quarters of the UN Member States have become parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, the gap between the existence of rights and their effective enjoyment derives from a lack of commitment by Governments in promoting and protecting those rights and the failure of Governments to inform women and men alike about them.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Promote and protect the human rights of women by fully implementing all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Review national laws to ensure implementation of all international human rights agreements;
- Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice;
- Achieve legal literacy.

MEDIA

Today, many women work in the media, but few have reached positions at decision-making levels. In most countries, the media continue to project a negative and degrading image of women and do not reflect women’s diverse lives and contributions to society. Violent and degrading or pornographic media products in particular affect women negatively.

Everywhere the media have the potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. They can create self-regulatory mechanisms that can help eliminate gender-biased programming. Women can also be empowered by having greater skills, knowledge and access to information technology.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Increase women’s participation in and access to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; Governments should aim at gender balance through the appointment of women and men to all advisory, management, regulatory or monitoring bodies;
- Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. The media organizations, NGOs and the private sector should promote the equal sharing of family

responsibility and produce materials that portray diverse roles of women leaders;

- Develop within mass media and advertising organizations professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation to promote the presentation of non-stereotyped images of women, consistent with freedom of expression.

ENVIRONMENT

Through their management and use of natural resources, women provide sustenance to their families and communities. As consumers and producers, caretakers of their families and educators, women play an important role in promoting sustainable development.

The deterioration of natural resources results in negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of the population at large, especially girls and women of all ages.

However, women, who are rarely formally trained as natural-resource managers, remain largely absent from decision-making and have their experience and skills too often marginalized. Despite the leadership role played by women’s organizations, institutional coordination with national bodies is very weak.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels, including as managers, designers and planners, and as implementers and evaluators of environmental projects;
- Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programs for sustainable development;
- Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environment policies on women.

THE GIRL-CHILD

In many countries, the girl-child faces discrimination from the earliest stages of life, through childhood and into adulthood. Due to harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference, early marriage, sexual exploitation and practices related to health and food allocation, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood in some areas of the world. Due to lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce such laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence. In many regions, girls face discrimination in access to education and specialized training.

More than 15 million girls aged 15 to 19 each year give birth and face pregnancy-related complications. Girls are also more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations, including HIV/AIDS.

The Platform recommends action to:

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl-child; enact and enforce appropriate legislation that guarantees equal right to succession and ensures equal right to inherit, regardless of the sex of the child;
- Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls;
- Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training;
- Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition;
- Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labor and protect young girls at work;
- Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.

INSTITUTIONAL & FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Platform for Action establishes a set of actions that should lead to fundamental change. Immediate action and accountability are essential if the targets are to be met by the year 2000.

Governments are primarily responsible for their implementation. However, success depends also on various national, regional and international institutions, public and private, which require clear and strong mandates, authority and resources.

At the national level, commitment at the highest political level is essential for the successful implementation of the Platform. By the end of 1996, all Governments should have their own national strategies or plans of action. Governments should establish or improve effectiveness of national machineries for the advancement of women, and seek the active support of a broad range of other actors.

At the regional and sub-regional levels, the regional commissions of the United Nations should promote and assist national institutions. Regional institutions should develop and publicize regional plans of action for implementing the Platform within given time-frames and resources.

At the international level, all entities of the United Nations system should have the necessary resources and support to carry out follow-up activities. International financial institutions are encouraged to review and revise policies to ensure that their investments and programs benefit women.

To ensure system-wide implementation of the Platform and to advise on gender issues, the Secretary-General of the United Nations is invited to establish a high-level post in his office. The Platform also calls for committing adequate financial resources from all sources and across all sectors.

CONTRACT WITH WOMEN OF THE USA®

As public officials, advocates for women's rights, policy makers, organizations and individuals, we sign this **Contract with Women of the USA®** to implement the Platform for Action adopted September 1995 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women by consensus of 189 governments, including the United States of America.

We pledge our mutual commitment to the goal of equality and empowerment for American women, who are the continuing majority of our nation and states.

We pledge to work together to overcome discrimination based on sex, race, class, age, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. We seek to end social, economic and political inequities, violence and the human rights abuses that still confront millions of women and girls in our country.

Looking to the 21st century, we enter into this **Contract with Women of the USA®** for ourselves and for future generations to achieve our vision of a healthy planet and healthy nations, states and communities, with peace, equality, and justice for all.

1. Empowerment of Women

We pledge to work for empowerment of women in all their diversity through equal participation in decision making and equal access to shared power in government, in all spheres and at every level of society.

2. Sharing Family Responsibilities

We pledge to work for equal sharing of family responsibilities, recognition and respect for the diversity of families, and for practices and policies that enhance the multiple roles, security and well-being of women and girls, men and boys.

3. Ending the Burden of Poverty

We pledge to work for economic justice and to end the increasing burden of poverty on women and their children, who are a majority of the poor. Recognizing the value of women's unpaid and underpaid labor to our families, communities and economy, we support a living wage for all workers and adequate funding for welfare and other social safety nets, child care, education and job training, and access to collateral-free credit for women-owned small businesses.

4. High Quality, Affordable Health Care

We pledge to work to reaffirm the rights of women and girls, regardless of income or where they live, to high quality, accessible, affordable and respectful physical and mental health care, based on sound women-focused research.

5. Sexual and Reproductive Rights

We pledge to work to reaffirm and uphold the sexual and reproductive rights of all women, including their right to control their own reproductive lives free of coercion, violence and harassment.

6. Workplace Rights

We pledge to work for guarantees of equal pay for work of comparable value and an end to discriminatory hiring and sexual harassment. We support family-friendly workplace practices, job training and opportunities programs, strengthening of affirmative action, employees' rights to organize unions and to work in safe, healthy working environments.

7. Educational Equity

We pledge to work for educational equity for women and girls, including creation and strengthening of gender-fair multicultural curricula and teaching techniques, equal

opportunities and access for girls and women throughout their lives to education, career development, training and scholarships, educational administration and policy making.

8. Ending Violence Against Women

We pledge to work for policies and programs to end violence against women and children in every form and to ensure that violence against women and children is understood as a violation of their human rights and civil rights.

9. Protecting a Healthy Environment

We pledge to work to end environmental degradation and eliminate toxic chemicals, nuclear wastes and other pollutants that threaten our health, our communities, country and planet. We uphold active roles by government at all levels and public and private sectors to continue and expand environmental protection programs.

10. Women as Peace Makers

We salute women's leading roles in peace movements and conflict resolution and pledge to work for their inclusion in policy making at all levels aimed at preventing wars, halting the

international arms trade and eliminating all nuclear testing. We seek reductions in military spending and conversion of military facilities to socially productive purposes.

11. Honor International Commitments and Ratify CEDAW

We pledge to support the commitments made by the United States government to implement the UN Platform for Action, which constitutes a contract with the world's women. We call on the United States Senate to ratify the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, which the United States has signed.

12. A Long-Term National Plan to Achieve Equality

We who are state and federal policy makers pledge to work in partnership with women's organizations to develop and enforce a long-term plan to achieve our goals of equality and empowerment for women. We support the re-establishment of a national Advisory Panel on Women and the creation or strengthening of similar panels or commissions in each state, to ensure that governments at every level take the necessary steps to implement this Contract.

**Copies of this publication are available for \$6.00 each.
Bulk rates are also available.**

PUBLICATIONS

Center for Women Policy Studies

1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Suite 450

Washington, DC 20036

202-872-1770 phone

202-296-8962 fax

cwps@centerwomenpolicy.org email

www.centerwomenpolicy.org website

©Copyright Center for Women Policy Studies, 2011

This publication may not be reproduced



***Center for Women
Policy Studies***

Center for Women Policy Studies

1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Suite 450

Washington, DC 20036

©Copyright Center for Women Policy Studies, 2011
This publication may not be reproduced