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**ACT|ADVANCE|ACHIEVE Women's Human Rights**

**Opening Statement for the NGO Forum  
Beijing Plus 20 Review for the UN ECE Region  
Geneva, Switzerland**

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Excellencies; my sisters and brothers to the NGO Forum; members of the media, friends and guests. A very warm welcome to you. It has taken some of you days to be with us today, coming by plane, train, buses or on foot! I am sure you are as excited, expectant and ready for the next three days as I am, together with my colleagues, your hosts, the NGO CSW-Geneva members.

The NGO CSW-Geneva is a volunteer group of 34 organisations working collaboratively with our sister NGO CSW committees in New York and Vienna in monitoring the commitments of Beijing and CEDAW at the United Nations, especially through the Human Rights Mechanisms and the UN Commission on the Status of Women. I thank my co-chair, and the Beijing Plus 20 Task Force and all members for your dedication to making this Forum happen! And indeed, to my own organisation, the World YWCA for all their support as I serve as President.

Before we start our programme, I would like to invite you to join me in **observing a moment of silence:**

- In honour of those who paved the road from the 1<sup>st</sup> UN Women's conference in Mexico(1975); Copenhagen (1980); Nairobi (1985),Beijing 1995 and the Vienna Conference on Human Rights (1994)who are no-longer with us today.
- in remembrance of those human rights defenders who lost their lives as they fought for the protection of human rights, defending our dignity and seeking justice
- We mourn those women and girls who have died as a result of violence, in their families, communities and in situations of war.
- We recall the many women who have lost their lives due to preventable causes, including maternal deaths, HIV, ebola including other diseases.

It is befitting that today we hold our NGO Forum at the United Nations, for people are at the centre of the vision of the United Nations. We therefore thank the United Nations Office in Geneva, through its Acting Director, Mr Michael Moller for this opportunity to convene here. We are meeting within the framework of the review process for the UN Economic Commission for Europe region, as we prepare to participate in the inter-governmental meeting to be held on November 6-7. 2014. I extend my great heartfelt appreciation to the

UNECE, its Executive Secretary, Mr Christian Friis Bach, represented at this opening session by Ms Monika Linn, the Principal Advisor and her colleague Ms Malinka Koparanova, the Senior Social Affairs Officer. We continue to enjoy here in Geneva the extraordinary collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who are today present with us. Again, we recognise the strong collaboration with the CEDAW Committee through its chair Ms Nicole Ameline, who together with other experts will be with us this week, even in-between the on-going session

In 1995, one of the strongest recommendations was for us to have strong institutional mechanisms for advancing gender equality, women's rights and empowerment. We are therefore hosting this Forum with a celebratory spirit, and with great expectations, with the establishment of UN Women, a key partner at this Forum. I invite you to join me in thanking the UN Women Executive Director, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and her team for their extraordinary collaboration, and especially the regional director, Ingiborg Gisladdattir, who facilitated translation into Russian for many of our background materials. Thank you. I would also like to add our appreciation to other UN agencies who continue to support our work.

We are deeply grateful to the City of Geneva for their extraordinary hospitality.. It is such an honour for us to have Mr Francois Longchamp, President of the State Council for the Canton of Geneva with us today, thank you, and for the generosity with the scholarships that have enabled many of our sisters to be present with us today. We thank the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation for the significant financial support that has made this Forum possible and for the generous advice from Ms Ursula Funk, Senior Advisor who is here with us today. We are also grateful to the governments of the United States of America and Canada for enabling our work, well as all other governments and individuals who have endorsed our Forum.

Let me thank all the convenors, moderators, presentors, facilitators, interpreters, volunteers and each one of you for this Forum. Thank you to Ms Sacha Gabizon of the Women's Major Group and Farida Lansarova, a young activist and co-founder Bishkek Feminist Collective for representing the voice of our community at this opening programme.

These three days are your space as civil society and as NGOs, academic institutions, media and citizens to advance gender equality and the empowerment and rights of women within the ECE region. We are more than 600 in this Forum, the biggest number we have for the regional reviews. Just like many of you present today, I attended the Beijing Conference in 1995, and my organisation like many of you here, has been at the forefront of these issues since the founding of the United Nations and the series of conferences held since 1975. It is with this deep history of commitment and passion that we again gather today; to shape the future.

Our theme for the Forum is **ACT- ADVANCE- ACHIEVE- Women's Human Rights, for which we** have set the following objectives.

1. **To contribute to the Beijing+20 review process, both at the ECE regional level and globally**, by providing vital perspectives, information and recommendations from a large base of NGOs and women's rights advocates active in Europe, Central Asia and North America. To this effect, the NGO Forum will examine selected issues from the 12 critical areas of concern\*\* of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action to
  - review progress made, remaining gaps and existing challenges
  - seek government accountability for their commitments and obligations to women's human rights and gender equality
2. **To identify emerging women's rights and gender equality issues** brought on by globalization, the fast development of the Internet and other new technologies, climate change and all of its consequences, migration and demographic changes, rising trafficking and violence against women, and the multiple crises affecting our increasingly interconnected world.
3. **To provide input for the current discussions on the Post-2015 Agenda**, on how a stand-alone goal on gender equality could be crafted and how women's issues could be best streamlined in all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are expected to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015.

The NGO Forum aims to **create an intergenerational space for open dialogue among NGOs, civil society and other stakeholders** from the 56 ECE member countries on the realities impacting women in this diverse region. The Forum will facilitate a candid exchange of views and information, the open voicing of concerns, establishment of common positions, sharing of best practices, and more.

### *Process of the Forum*

Our Forum is designed to be an interactive platform and space, for all of you together, in which we bring our views appreciating our different cultures, languages and experiences towards a common goal. We strive to remain respectful of each other, even when we disagree. We understand that the issues we will be discussing are located in our own lived experiences, and those of our loved ones, our neighbours and our families. We therefore recall that the personal is political, and that the local is global. We understand that this Forum and this Beijing plus 20 review process is about our rights and our dignity, our past our present and our future.

We will have plenary sessions and 16 roundtables. We have established an Editorial Committee with input from all your regions, chaired by Manjit Dosanjh, of the International Federation of University Women. We encourage you to bring your recommendations through the Convenors and Rapporteurs of your Roundtables to the Editorial Committee. We will draw on the abstracts you have submitted to us, as well as papers you have submitted from your sub-regions and countries. On November 5, we will adopt the final recommendations coming from our Forum, in plenary. We will then present these recommendations officially to the ECE inter-governmental meeting during the opening session. We want to thank the UNECE and member states for already affording us this opportunity to directly submit our recommendations as an official record of the UNECE report. These recommendations will form the common platform for our advocacy actions and engagements for the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women; the post 2015 agenda and beyond.

Without pre-empting the discussions for the next three days, I want to share with you my singular view and recommendation. Twenty years post Beijing, we have baskets and baskets of policies, laws and legal instruments for the advancement of women and gender equality in this region and globally, including CEDAW. We have a huge implementation and accountability deficit; a big gap between the normative values and our lived experiences.. I therefore recommend that our outcome document be centred on IMPLEMENTATION; ACCOUNTABILITY and RESOURCING. It should provide the critical directions and DOABLE actions that enable the world to move from rhetoric to reality. It must reassert and reinvigorate the commitment to human rights, as the framework underlying development, peace; equality and justice.

May we all be inspired as we inspire and define the future.