Feminist Agenda beyond Colonial Structures: Reflections in the Post-Beijing Era

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Introduction

This report is part of the broader commitment of feminist movements across the Arab region and the Global South to amplify the importance of addressing global shifts and the challenges that women face today—three decades after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also aims to reflect the concerns of feminist groups in these regions regarding the ongoing erosion in the effectiveness of international mechanisms addressing women's rights, particularly those established through the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women. These concerns are especially focused on the challenges of implementing these mechanisms on the ground, and whether the tools and frameworks of the United Nations genuinely express the priorities and lived experiences of women as defined by themselves. A critical examination of many existing international mechanisms reveals a prevailing issue: they often present a generalized and limited approach that struggles to move beyond an overarching Western-centric framework. This perspective tends to generalize women's issues based on priorities established in Western contexts, which frequently fails to fully capture the unique, intersectional challenges faced by women in other regions.

It is essential to acknowledge that the development of numerous international agreements and mechanisms was initially shaped by the political and economic realities during the formative years of the United Nations human rights system. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a seminal document that underscored the significance of civil liberties, decolonization, and the right to self-determination, while also defining various personal rights. This Declaration thus marked a pivotal moment in linking personal rights to the broader imperative of liberation from colonial and oppressive systems. Similar intentions were echoed in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which emerged as a response to the systemic racial discrimination prevalent, particularly against Black communities, in the United States and other Western countries. These principles were further upheld by the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, as well as Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As such, the early human rights framework was promising, in its capacity to engage directly with the historical, political, and economic contexts of its time. However, the progression of international human rights law, which was expected to expand the scope of rights through the adoption of specific conventions dedicated to vulnerable groups—including women, children, and persons with disabilities—has largely failed to meet these expectations

Hence, instead of developing a human rights perspective to deal with rights from the perspective of justice and taking into account political and economic contexts, we find that it reduced rights to a set of personal rights separate from the contexts in which violations of rights occur, and gave a significant role to culture without linking them to the political dimension. Talking about women's rights has become linked to the level of progress of women

as individuals and not through confronting the structural dimensions that hinder women and limit progress to reach equality and justice, with the meaning of these concepts of justice and equality for all.

The aim of this report is not to evaluate all international mechanisms related to women. Rather, it focuses specifically on examining the outcomes of international women's conferences, from Mexico to Beijing (1975-1995), and attempts to present a vision of the key challenges resulting from the cessation of international women's conferences over the past 30 years. This cessation has significantly frozen the feminist agenda for three decades, limiting it to the outcomes and framework of the Beijing Platform for Action. This has constrained progress on the feminist agenda by restricting the discussions and reviews that typically occur during these conferences, confining them within the parameters of the Beijing Platform. Consequently, it has reduced the opportunities for the feminist agenda to evolve in response to political and economic developments since the 1990s, and to align with the priorities of women in the Global South, who bear the brunt of neoliberal policies and modern colonialism. These policies have given rise to new forms of discrimination, exploitation, subjugation, and conflict in the Global South.

The post-Cold War global order, characterized by the unipolar dominance of the United States as the sole superpower, has given rise to new forms of conflict and systemic inequities. Examples include the atrocities in Rwanda, Kosovo, Sudan, Somalia, the Republic of the Congo, and other regions, alongside the persistence of settler colonialism in Palestine. Additionally, indirect colonialism has proliferated through mechanisms such as economic control, the erosion of national sovereignty over resources, and the increasing dominance of multinational corporations driven by privatization policies, free market ideologies, and other globalization agendas. These modern dynamics, deeply rooted in colonial histories and their contemporary manifestations, have perpetuated the systematic impoverishment of nations in the Global South, fostering environments of nepotism, corruption, and dependence on the United States and its European allies. These conditions have had profound repercussions for women, who are disproportionately affected by discriminatory public policies, systemic violence, and economic inequality. The intersection of these factors underscores the inextricable link between women's rights and the broader political and economic contexts, which both influence and are influenced by structural gender-based inequities.

Within this vision of the post-1990s challenges, shaped by globalization and modern liberal policies, it becomes evident that a new framework is required—one that identifies these challenges and establishes an agenda that genuinely reflects them. This is in contrast to agendas rooted in the outcomes of the Beijing Conference, which, as this report will demonstrate, not only fail to address the current realities but also represent a regression in the feminist agenda. Specifically, these outcomes marginalize diverse feminist approaches, such as those emerging from the Global South, including postcolonial feminist perspectives and Black feminist interpretations of women's rights through an intersectional lens. The

report argues that this marginalization results from the dominance of Western feminism over the frameworks and tools of women's rights, as well as its alignment with the interests of modern neoliberalism. This dominance has constrained the feminist discourse, sidelining critical perspectives that address the nuanced and intersectional realities of women in the Global South, and hindering the development of a truly inclusive and transformative feminist agenda.

The participation of feminists from the Global South in international women's conferences, beginning with the inaugural conference in Mexico in 1975—which marked the launch of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975–1985)—represents a pivotal moment in the global feminist movement. These feminists played a crucial role in challenging dominant theoretical frameworks concerning women's rights, striving to influence Western-centric agendas by advocating for the inseparability of women's rights from broader economic and political policies. The significance of their contributions extended beyond the sheer scale of their impact on international platforms and UN mechanisms. It also lay in the solidarity they fostered between feminist movements in the Global South and those in the Western world that opposed racist and colonial policies.

Feminist movements have been pivotal in advancing struggles for justice and equality, both locally and internationally. Feminists from the Global South, in particular, have made significant contributions by deconstructing colonial and Zionist narratives and underscoring the interconnectedness of feminist struggles with the broader liberation movements of oppressed peoples. These movements were not only vocal supporters of the Palestinian cause but also instrumental in exposing the colonial and racist underpinnings of the Zionist project and its intrinsic connection to the global capitalist system's colonial domination initiatives. For instance, feminist activists demonstrated that settler colonialism in Palestine mirrors the apartheid system in South Africa. This equivalence was prominently addressed at both the Copenhagen and Nairobi conferences.

On the other hand, there is currently a glaring inaction at the international level, particularly within the United Nations and its various mechanisms, including those specifically dedicated to women. This is starkly evident in the ongoing genocide in Gaza, which, at the time of writing this report, has persisted for over a year. International feminist solidarity, especially within the frameworks and mechanisms of the United Nations focused on women, remains disconnected from the lived realities of feminist movements and the centrality of the Palestinian cause within this struggle.[1] UN agencies have not only failed to protect Palestinian women—who are subjected to the gravest forms of violence, including killings, displacement, and starvation—but have also chosen to address this genocide in two deeply flawed ways. The first reflects a Western-centric bias, with disproportionate attention given to the lives of Israeli women over Palestinian women. This is evident in the adoption of Zionist narratives

and unsubstantiated claims about sexual assaults during the events of October 7, as reflected in statements from the report of the Special Rapporteur on Sexual [2]Violence. In contrast, there has been complete silence regarding well-documented UN reports confirming sexual violence against Palestinian detainees in Israeli detention centers. The second approach is cloaked in the guise of "neutrality, " which dismisses the historical context of the Palestinian issue, framing it as a conflict between two equal parties. This narrative conveniently overlooks the systemic oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people under a settler-colonial occupation that has persisted for over 76 years, effectively erasing the realities of occupation and colonial violence from the discourse.

Despite the distinct nature of the Palestinian issue as the last remaining colonial struggle, the international inaction toward the genocide of the Palestinian people exemplifies not only the failure of international mechanisms to support oppressed populations but also the limitations in applying the principles of justice and equality these mechanisms purport to uphold. While this failure is glaringly evident in Palestine, it is not confined to it. Similar shortcomings are visible in other countries, such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, and Syria, which have been turned into battlegrounds for regional and international conflicts closely tied to the strategic and economic interests of Western powers, particularly the United States. These and other conflicts over the past decades—stretching from the 1990s to the present—have posed significant challenges to the United Nations system for human rights and international humanitarian law. Examples include the genocide in Rwanda (1994), the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), the crisis in Darfur (2003–present), the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2001), the war in Afghanistan (2001), the Iraq War (2003), and others. These crises have not only exposed the fragility of the United Nations framework but also highlighted the limitations of its human rights system and specialized mechanisms, particularly in protecting women. These mechanisms, lacking effective enforcement tools, have repeatedly struggled to address violations, leaving vulnerable populations without meaningful protection.

This report is grounded in the premise that economic and political transformations—particularly the emergence of a new world order following the Cold War and the global dominance of modern neoliberalism—have significantly impacted women's agendas, especially within international frameworks and mechanisms. These shifts have profoundly influenced the women's rights agenda within the United Nations system, resulting in notable changes not only in how international mechanisms address women's issues but also in the processes of programming, development, and the nature of solidarity and women's activism at global, regional, and local levels.

[2] United Nations, General Assembly, "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories," 20 September 2024, https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F79%2F363&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False.

This report begins with the premise that the 1995 Beijing Conference was a pivotal milestone that both reflected and shaped global political transformations, significantly influencing the feminist agenda. One of its most notable impacts was the depoliticization of women's issues. The outcomes of the Beijing Platform for Action marked a shift in the focus and tools of global feminist movements. While it prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment, the platform was deeply shaped by the emerging neoliberal world order, which emphasizes the separation of the private and public spheres and promotes global development programs that align with neoliberal economic policies. This influence redefined the priorities of the feminist agenda. Although the conference provided an important platform to unify feminist efforts worldwide, it marginalized critical issues such as neo-colonialism, economic justice, and the broader impacts of globalization on women in the Global South. These systemic concerns were overshadowed by a narrower focus on economic development and women's empowerment as framed within the neoliberal paradigm. Consequently, while the conference marked progress in some areas, it simultaneously narrowed the feminist discourse to align with dominant global economic interests, sidelining deeper structural and systemic issues.

While the Beijing Conference represented a significant advancement in incorporating women's issues into the human rights framework, it simultaneously contributed to the separation of human rights from social justice dimensions. As we approach 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is clear that a comprehensive review is necessary—not just to critique its framework but to establish a new, inclusive agenda. Such a framework must account for global changes, diverse experiences of women, and prioritize the voices and needs of women in the Global South, ensuring equitable representation in the global women's rights agenda. The follow-up conferences to Beijing, including Beijing +5, Beijing +10, and Beijing +25, have largely failed to address the evolving realities of women's lives. Instead, they have treated the outcomes of the 1995 Beijing Conference as a static and almost sacrosanct document, neglecting to critically engage with the multiplicity and diversity of women's issues. These conferences have approached women's rights in an undifferentiated manner, applying the same tools and methodologies across diverse regions of the world without adapting to the unique social, economic, and cultural contexts that shape women's lived realities. This approach undermines the potential for a more nuanced, region-specific, and transformative feminist agenda that can respond to the complexities of the current global landscape.

This report aims to examine the global political and economic changes and their impact, first, on the outcomes of the Beijing Conference and the transformations it introduced regarding the central issues prioritized by feminists from the Global South. The report then seeks to analyze the relevance of the Beijing outcomes in light of subsequent global shifts, making it imperative—30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action—to reinterpret these outcomes. This re-reading must account for global transformations, changes in how

women’s issues are addressed within United Nations frameworks, and the varying national and regional contexts. As part of this re-evaluation of the Beijing Framework and the call to rethink the global feminist agenda, it is equally important to assess the realities under which feminist organizations operate in each region. This requires identifying the specific challenges they face, engaging in self-criticism, and acknowledging the responsibilities borne by feminist movements. Such an approach is essential to ensure a more inclusive, contextually relevant, and transformative feminist agenda that aligns with contemporary global realities.

The report is structured into four sections, each addressing a key aspect of the evolution of global women's conferences, their underlying trends, their connections to political and economic contexts, and the challenges faced by feminist movements. Section I This section provides a concise overview of the development of international mechanisms for women's rights, tracing their evolution from the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in 1946 to the Beijing Conference in 1995. It highlights how the outcomes of these conferences have been shaped in response to shifts in global economic and political contexts. Section II: This section examines the state of decline in addressing women’s issues from the perspective of the Global South within the framework of the Beijing approach. It offers a critical analysis of this decline, illustrating it with specific examples, including an in-depth focus on the Palestinian issue as a case study to underscore the marginalization and challenges within the broader feminist agenda.

Section III: This section explores the evolution of feminist thought as reflected in the outcomes of global women's conferences, with a particular focus on theoretical concepts such as postcolonial feminism, feminist liberation, and intersectionality. It reviews the significance of these theoretical advancements in shaping the agendas of global feminist conferences and enhancing their tools and approaches. Building on this theoretical review, the report seeks to illuminate the specific challenges posed by the gap between the development of feminist thought—marked by the emergence of diverse feminist approaches that challenge liberal Western paradigms of addressing women’s issues—and the international frameworks and mechanisms that continue to predominantly adopt a Western-centric vision of women’s rights. This tension underscores the need for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach within global feminist agendas and international mechanisms.

The fourth section provides a summary of the post-Beijing global political and economic changes that pose new challenges to access to gender equality and social justice. Hence, this quick reading aims to summarize the most important systemic political, economic and institutional challenges that must be taken into account to develop a new framework for gender equality and gender justice.

Section V: Conclusion The conclusion outlines a proposed feminist agenda that integrates global economic and political developments, emphasizing strategies to confront these challenges effectively. It prioritizes placing the issues of women in the Global South at the core of the outcomes of future feminist conferences, ensuring that their perspectives and

realities shape the global feminist discourse and agenda-setting. This approach calls for a transformative framework that responds to contemporary global shifts while addressing the diverse and intersectional needs of women worldwide.[3]

Pre-Beijing: Review of the Evolution of International Conventions on Women's Rights:

It is important to note at the outset that the spaces available for feminist movements and civil society organizations within the framework of the United Nations face several structural and ideological challenges that limit their effectiveness in achieving radical change. This is linked to the founding of the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II, when the organization was established with the aim of achieving peace and promoting trade. However, goals related to peace and independence became secondary compared to the development agenda, particularly with the independence of countries in Africa and Asia from colonialism. The issue of inequality among states persists, with some countries enjoying privileges through their permanent membership in the Security Council. These privileges allow them and their allies to escape accountability for violations of individual and collective rights, even in cases of crimes against humanity, as witnessed in Iraq. Similarly, the permanent protection provided by the United States to the colonial-settlement state in Palestine, as is currently evident in the ongoing genocide in Gaza, exacerbates this disparity.

The unequal relationship between states is further evident in the perspective of certain member states, particularly the United States, which views many developed countries as providers of "aid" to developing nations, rather than as equals in addressing shared global issues. This deepens the divide between nations and frames their relations on hierarchical grounds (Desai 2005).(Desai 2005) Consequently, the development discourse reflects a neoliberal and neo-colonial stance, manifesting in the structure of the Security Council, the veto power granted to the victors of World War II, and the United Nations' developmental language that classifies nations based on their economic development levels.

One of the most significant international changes has been the adoption of the state model within the new global system as the protector and guarantor of human rights and freedoms, both for individuals and groups under its jurisdiction. However, this rights system in the United Nations has established several problematic dynamics, often pitting individual rights against one another. Many of these rights are anchored in the principle of citizenship, thereby limiting rights primarily to citizens within a state while explicitly excluding those without citizenship from enjoying the same rights. As a result, citizenship was given an individual dimension, yet simultaneously became a tool of structural discrimination. This discrimination

[3] It is important to note that this report is not an in-depth research, but a reading of the outcomes of Beijing by linking them to the outcomes of previous conferences, and what the report proves is the state of decline that occurred in dealing with women's issues in the Global South, and also by linking them to the political and economic changes that occurred after the Beijing Conference in 1995. This report reflects the point of view of a special coalition led by the Jordanian Women's Union, which includes organizations from various Arab countries in addition to an alliance with organizations from South Africa.

stems from the differing definitions that states apply to what constitutes a "citizen," thereby severing the concept of rights—supposedly universal and indivisible—from the political and legal frameworks that determine them within each state. This separation between global rights and citizenship rights has led to a hierarchy within the rights system itself, where rights heavily depend on an individual's legal status within a state. For example, while citizens may enjoy full rights under national laws, refugees, stateless individuals, and migrant workers are often excluded from these rights, exacerbating structural gaps within societies.

For women, this system adds another layer of discrimination. Even within the framework of citizenship, women's rights are impacted by gender-based hierarchies. Women, even when they are citizens, are often deprived of full rights due to institutional discrimination that reinforces gender inequality, whether through discriminatory laws or cultural and social practices that limit their access to resources and opportunities. For non-citizen women, the discrimination is twofold: first, based on their gender, and second, based on their legal status. Moreover, these issues are further compounded when viewed through the lens of the global political and economic system. In the context of globalization and free-market policies, states have become increasingly dependent on major economic powers and multinational corporations, reducing their ability to provide comprehensive protection for the rights of their citizens or residents. Women, especially in the Global South, bear the brunt of these policies, finding themselves excluded from the legal and social protection networks offered by the modern human rights system.

As a response to these challenges, the United Nations established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to address discrimination faced by women globally. However, as will be discussed, the commission was not granted sufficient authority to enable it to effect substantial changes in the conditions of women. Initially, its role was limited to conducting studies and presenting projects, making its influence secondary and reflective of the views of member states, rather than acting as an independent and effective mechanism genuinely representing women's needs and advocating for their issues.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1946 with the aim of promoting gender equality and empowering women. It remains the only United Nations body dedicated to improving the status of women worldwide. The commission has prepared several international conventions and studies addressing women's political, civil, social, and economic status, as well as programs for integrating women into development. It was through its initiatives that 1975 was declared the International Year of Women, and the UN World Conference on the International Women's Decade was held in Mexico City(Galey 1979)

The CSW was the first formal international mechanism specifically focusing on women's issues, contributing significantly to advancing women's role in global policies and developing standards for women's rights. Through the CSW, efforts were made to draft the first

international conventions on women's rights, such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Since its establishment, the CSW has been mandated to conduct studies and issue recommendations on various women's rights issues to provide a legal basis for developing a database on non-discrimination. However, the commission has not been granted the authority to hold United Nations entities or external bodies accountable. Instead, it can only provide recommendations to implement or activate its proposals, leaving it with very limited power. (Maran 1996; Roberts 1996; Galey 1979)

The commission has set a goal of "enhancing the status of women, regardless of nationality, race, language, or religion, to achieve equality with men in all areas of human activity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in public law, legal rules, or and the ways in which norms are interpreted and applied." Thus, the focus on discrimination against women and equality has been a major concern for the CSW. However, the concept of equality has been confined to equality with men, without acknowledging other forms of discrimination and inequality present in different societies, such as those based on race, class, and other differences.

As mentioned earlier, the limited authority granted to the CSW, its non-binding powers, and its program narrowly focused on discrimination reflect a view of women as playing a "complementary" rather than a fundamental role. Additionally, the struggle for equality has been constrained by a Western perspective, as seen in the definition of discrimination adopted by the commission. In 1996, the Economic and Social Council expanded the commission's mandate through Resolution 1996/6, determining that it should play a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and challenges related to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and integrating a gender perspective into UN activities. While this was a significant development, the monitoring and review outcomes lack binding implementation measures, remaining at the level of recommendations.

This issue is not confined to the authority of the Women's Committee but extends to the broader human rights system within the United Nations, which remains rooted in the principle of state sovereignty. This principle grants states the ultimate authority over their citizens and the determination of what rights are deemed acceptable or unacceptable. Consequently, all specialized human rights bodies, including the Women's Rights Committee, face the same challenges related to implementation and enforcement. The execution of proposals and recommendations from these bodies largely depends on the moral commitment of states to adopt and implement them. It is therefore important to highlight that the outcomes of the annual conferences on women organized by the Commission on the Status of Women, including the so-called "agreed conclusions" endorsed by member states, are significant for reinforcing the women's rights framework. However, their impact remains limited, constrained by the authority granted to the Commission and the overarching principles of sovereignty and citizenship discussed earlier.

These conclusions undergo a process of discussion and negotiation, which often results in the inclusion of issues that were not originally on the agenda. This negotiation process, combined with the opportunity for civil society organizations from around the world to participate and submit proposals, has transformed these conferences into spaces of advocacy, solidarity, and support among civil society actors. This is particularly true for feminist movements from the Global South, which have long utilized these spaces to advance women's issues beyond the Western perspective on rights, extending the discourse to include principles of social justice, liberation from colonialism and slavery, and other pressing concerns. As such, the annual conferences organized by the committee are deeply shaped by political and economic dynamics, as well as by the influence of parties capable of negotiating and lobbying during these events. These dynamics are reflected in the formulation of the agenda, the selection of issues for discussion, and the ultimate impact on the outcomes of the conferences.

The impact of these dynamics will be addressed in the next section, which examines women's conferences from Mexico to Beijing. This analysis will explore how the feminist agenda has evolved and the challenges it has encountered as a result of global political and economic changes. In essence, these conferences served as critical platforms for the exchange of ideas and debates on women's rights, reflecting the global and local tensions that shaped the status of women on the international stage. However, significant obstacles persist, particularly related to the issue of power dynamics and the structural composition of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and its narrowly defined objectives. A major hindrance to meaningful progress on women's issues within the United Nations framework lies in the control exerted by influential states over the annual agenda of the CSW. This dominance has constrained the negotiation processes at these conferences, diminishing the diversity of perspectives and approaches that could have enriched development strategies and advanced inclusive visions for women's rights.

The assessment of the status of the CSW here is similar to that of all UN human rights bodies, which calls for consideration of changing the structure and framework of the Commission's work. More importantly, they must be independent of the currently dominant political forces that are pushing for limiting rights to specific groups which negatively affects their effectiveness and their ability to achieve the stated objectives. Reforming these aspects is vital to ensure real and tangible progress on women's issues both regionally and internationally.

Women's Conferences - Women's Decade 1975-1985

The first women's conference was held in Mexico in 1975 to launch the United Nations Decade for Women and adopt a global plan of action for achieving gender equality. This plan outlined specific, concrete steps for member states to take during the first five years of the decade. Each subsequent conference adopted an action plan that committed member states to specific measures aimed at improving women's status and achieving the goals of equality, development, and peace—the core themes of the decade. Each conference was accompanied

by an informal parallel forum for non-governmental women's organizations. These forums attracted growing numbers of women determined to influence the outcomes of the official UN conferences. They became opportunities for networking, exchanging information, celebrating achievements, and planning future advocacy efforts.

The Copenhagen Conference in 1980 was held to review and evaluate the progress made during the first half of the decade and to identify measures needed for the latter half. By the end of the decade, Nairobi hosted the 1985 conference, where governments adopted the "Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women," committing to achieving the decade's goals by the year 2000. This strategy identified the obstacles preventing women from achieving equality, development, and peace, proposed measures to overcome these barriers, and outlined strategies for implementation at both the international and national levels. Commitments included integrating women into all stages and levels of planning and decision-making processes on issues that affect them and addressing specific concerns such as health, political participation, education, paid labor, peace, the environment, and violence against women. Member states were required to submit periodic reports to the United Nations on their progress (Maran 1996; Roberts 1996).

First Mexico International Conference on Women – 1975:

This conference was held as part of the United Nations' declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year. It marked a turning point in the history of international feminism, laying the foundation for a global women's rights conference to be held every decade. The conference adopted a program of action focused on achieving full gender equality in all fields, including education, employment, and politics. It also launched the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), designating this period for global efforts to achieve gender balance.

The conference brought together feminists and women's rights activists from around the world, including the Global South, and raised critical issues related to colonialism, racism, and gender discrimination. One of the conference's key achievements, alongside a series of impactful policy decisions, was the recognition of the interconnected struggles against racism and colonialism. This framework provided an opportunity to address the Palestinian cause within a broader context of anti-colonial liberation.

The most prominent outcomes of the conference:

1. One of the most significant outcomes of the conference was the adoption of a resolution defining Zionism as a form of racism. This decision was the result of intense discussions led by delegations from the Global South, particularly from the Arab and African regions. It was a bold move that reflected a deep understanding of the relationship between settler colonialism in Palestine and the global systems of racism and imperialism.

2. The conference initiated the United Nations Decade for Women, aimed at promoting gender equality on a global scale. This decade emphasized addressing feminist issues within a broader framework of struggles against colonialism and racial discrimination.
3. Inclusion of Issues Affecting Women in the Global South: The conference amplified the voices of women from the Global South and placed their issues at the center of the international agenda. Topics such as poverty, development, and economic inequality were highlighted, reinforcing the inseparability of feminist movements in the Global South from broader liberation struggles in colonized and marginalized regions.

The final plan of action called for the development and adoption of an international convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on gender and recommended measures for its implementation. During this meeting, three goals were identified for the decade:

- Full gender equality and the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination;
- Full integration and participation of women in development;
- Increased contributions of women to the promotion of global peace..

The plan encouraged governments to formulate national strategies, goals, and priorities. This led to the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), providing an institutional framework for research, training, and operational activities in this field.

The Impact of Feminists from the Global South at the Conference

1. Linking Feminist Struggles with Anti-Colonial Liberation: Feminists from the Global South were pioneers in highlighting the connection between gender issues and anti-colonial struggles. They emphasized that women's liberation cannot be achieved under colonial or racist systems, asserting that the fight for economic and social justice is intrinsically linked to resistance against imperialist domination.
2. Raising Awareness of the Palestinian Cause: Feminists from the Global South, particularly those from Arab and African nations, played a key role in framing Palestine as a colonial issue. These feminists were instrumental in pushing for an agenda that integrated the struggle against colonialism in Palestine with other liberation movements. Through alliances with Third World nations, they strengthened the discourse around Palestine as not only a matter of occupation but also of systemic racism and imperialism
3. Influencing International Decisions: Feminist movements from the Global South significantly influenced United Nations decisions to adopt a broader understanding of colonialism, including settler colonialism in Palestine. This impact was evident in

decisions like the 1975 resolution recognizing Zionism as a form of racism, though this resolution was later revoked in the 1990s.

The Mexico Conference was a pivotal moment for the global feminist movement, particularly in amplifying the role of feminists from the Global South in placing colonial issues, including Palestine, on the international agenda. These movements succeeded in bringing the anti-colonial struggle into the global feminist discourse, contributing to a more inclusive agenda that linked gender issues with broader liberation struggles against racism and colonialism. Thus, the Mexico Conference exemplified the intersection of feminist and political issues, as evident in the nearly one hundred references to colonialism in the conference's outcomes. The conference also expanded the definition of peace to include the concept of justice, rather than merely the absence of conflict:

> "Achieving peace, which is not merely the absence of conflict but is based on justice and equality for all, requires sustained international cooperation from all nations and peoples. To this end, the plan calls for the full participation of women in all efforts aimed at promoting and maintaining peace, eliminating racial discrimination and colonialism in all its forms, and contributing to the realization of self-determination." (1)[4]

Palestinian and Arab Women - World Conference for the International Women's Year

Recognizing the goals and objectives of the International Women's Year and reaffirming the fundamental purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly the preservation of international peace and global security, as well as the promotion of friendly relations among nations,
Deeply concerned about the prevailing political, social, demographic, and economic conditions of the Palestinian people, particularly the circumstances faced by Palestinian women, and acknowledging the close connection between these conditions and the Palestinian cause,
Emphasizing the absurdity of discussing human equality while millions suffer under the yoke of colonialism,
Considering that international cooperation and peace require national independence, liberation, the eradication of colonialism, neoliberalism, fascism, Zionism, apartheid, foreign occupation, alien domination, and all forms of racial discrimination, as well as respect for human rights,
Gravely concerned that a just solution to the Palestinian issue has yet to be achieved and noting that the Palestinian cause and the situation in the Middle East continue to threaten international peace and global security,
Expressing deep concern that Palestinian women and the Palestinian people have been

[4] Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n76/353/95/pdf/n7635395.pdf E_CONF-66_CC_2-EN.pdf

denied the enjoyment of their inalienable rights, particularly their right to return to their homes and properties from which they were displaced, their right to self-determination, and their right to national independence and sovereignty,
Acknowledging that mass displacement from their homeland hinders women's participation and integration in progress efforts,
Reaffirming the Palestinian woman's right to play a stronger and more effective role in promoting peace and fostering friendly relations among nations,
Recalling General Assembly Resolution 3236 (XXIX) of November 22, 1974, and Resolution 3281 (XXIX) of December 12, 1974, which adopted the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States,R
ecalling the final resolutions and declarations of the regional seminars held in Mogadishu, Kinshasa, and Caracas:

1. **Calls on all women around the world to declare their solidarity and support for Palestinian women and the Palestinian people in their efforts to end the flagrant violations of fundamental human rights being committed in the occupied territories.**
2. **Urges all women worldwide to take necessary measures to ensure the release of thousands of individuals—freedom fighters for self-determination, liberation, and independence—arbitrarily detained in the prisons of the occupying forces.**
3. **Calls on all states and international organizations to provide both moral and material support to Palestinian and Arab women, as well as to the Palestinian people, in their struggle against Zionism, foreign occupation, alien domination, and external aggression. It further calls for assistance in reclaiming their inalienable rights in Palestine, particularly their right to return to their homes and properties from which they were displaced, their right to self-determination, and their right to national independence and sovereignty in accordance with the United Nations Charter.**
4. **Requests the United Nations, its bodies, and specialized agencies, as well as all national, regional, and international women's organizations, to provide support in their collective efforts to achieve these aims.**

p.111[5]

Second Copenhagen International Conference on Women – 1980:

The Copenhagen Conference was held to follow up on the achievements of the Mexico Conference. Despite the progress made, participants recognized that women continued to face structural discrimination across multiple domains. As a result, the conference focused on bridging the gaps between international policies and their practical implementation at the

[5] E_CONF.66_34-EN.pdf.

national level. It also emphasized the importance of improving educational opportunities for women, access to healthcare, and expanding employment opportunities.

The conference produced more specific outcomes compared to Mexico, including a detailed action plan with practical recommendations for member states and a renewed emphasis on women's role in development. The growing awareness of complex problems was evident in the following:

1. **In-depth Analysis of** Gender, Class, and Race: The conference highlighted the complex intersections between gender, social class, and race, showing how these factors shape women's diverse experiences.
2. **Understanding the Impact of Colonialism and War**: Feminist movements acknowledged the significant effects of colonialism, armed conflict, and migration on women's status, calling for an examination of how these conditions impact women's rights and dignity.
3. **Emphasis on Multiple Rights: Women's rights** were underscored as an integral part of human rights, pushing for a global recognition that addressing women's issues requires multidimensional strategies encompassing social, economic, and political aspects.
4. **Call to Action**: This growing awareness was reflected in the conference outcomes, which called for concrete actions to address these challenges. These included establishing national mechanisms, increasing women's representation in political processes, integrating women's issues into national plans, and recognizing that women's right to self-determination is closely linked to the right of colonized peoples to liberation. These outcomes reflected a deeper understanding of the conditions women face worldwide.

A summary of the main outcomes of this conference:

1. **Copenhagen Declaration**: A declaration emphasizing the importance of promoting women's rights and supporting their role in all aspects of social, economic, and political life.
2. **Action Plan**: A detailed plan recommending that member states integrate women's issues into national policies and promote women's active participation in all areas of development.
3. **Human Rights Emphasis**: Women's rights were recognized as an inseparable part of human rights, fostering a holistic perspective on women's rights at both the local and international levels.
4. **Women's Role in Development**: The conference underscored the significance of women's contributions to economic and social development and the need for gender equality in these processes.

5. **Combating Violence Against Women**: Effective measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women and enhance legal and social protections for survivors were highlighted.
6. **International Cooperation**: The conference called for strengthened international cooperation on women's rights, encouraging the exchange of experiences and expertise among countries.
7. **Monitoring Progress**: It emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluating progress on women's issues at national and international levels.

Key Outcomes Related to Colonialism and Palestine

- Focus on Women in Global Contexts: The conference paid significant attention to women's issues under colonial and occupied conditions, stressing the need to address the challenges faced by women in developing countries and the Global South, including Palestinian women.
- Linking Liberation Struggles with Women's Rights: The conference highlighted how women's struggles for their rights are directly linked to broader struggles against colonialism and apartheid, reflecting an increasing awareness of the complex relationships between gender issues and colonialism
- The conference identified settler colonialism in Palestine as a threat to world peace as evidenced by the following outputs:

  "The international community is deeply concerned that a just solution to the problem of Palestine has not yet been reached, and recognizes that this problem and the situation in the Middle East continue to pose a threat to international peace and world security."[6]

"The international community is deeply concerned about the prevailing conditions - political, social, demographic and economic - of the Palestinian people, particularly the conditions experienced by Palestinian women. It also recognizes the close relationship between these situations and the question of Palestine." (110)

"Taking into account the role that women have played in the history of humanity, especially in the struggle for national liberation, the promotion of international peace, the elimination of imperialism, colonialism, neoliberalism, foreign occupation, Zionism, foreign domination, racism, and apartheid," (3)

"International cooperation and peace require the achievement of national liberation and independence, the elimination of colonialism, neoliberalism, foreign occupation, Zionism,

[6] United Nations, Report of the World Conference of the International Year of Women, Mexico City, 19 June–2 July 1975, p. 110, n7635395.pdf.

apartheid, and racial discrimination in all its forms, as well as the recognition of the dignity of peoples and their right to self-determination." (9)

"It also gave space to the issues of women under occupation, including neo-colonialism and linked it to the types of violence against women through the suffering it caused to women," women and men together must eliminate colonialism, neoliberalism, imperialism, foreign domination and occupation, Zionism, apartheid, racial discrimination, and land grabs by force and recognize those processes, as these practices cause unbearable suffering to women, men, and children."(9p.)

The outcomes of the conference linked individual rights to national rights by defining what peace processes require: "Peace requires the achievement of national liberation, political and economic independence, the elimination of colonialism and neoliberalism, fascism and other similar ideologies, foreign occupation, apartheid, racism and discrimination in all its forms, in addition to the recognition of the dignity of the individual, the appreciation of the human being and his right to self-determination. In order to achieve this, the plan calls for the full participation of women in all efforts for peace (p. 13).

Support for Palestinian Women's Rights: The conference explicitly supported Palestinian women's rights, framing their struggle as part of the broader resistance against Zionism and colonialism: "It calls on all nations and international organizations to provide moral and material assistance to Palestinian and Arab women and the Palestinian people in their struggle against Zionism, foreign occupation, and alien domination, and to support their efforts to reclaim their inalienable rights in Palestine, particularly their right to return to their homes and properties, their right to self-determination, and their right to national independence and sovereignty, in accordance with the UN Charter" (p. 6).

These outcomes, influenced by feminist alliances from the Global South, pushed the UN to recognize Zionism and colonialism as critical global issues. For example, the General Assembly decided, by a majority vote of 59 to 19, with 25 abstentions, to retain the term "Zionism" in key paragraphs of the declaration. This reflected a political balance in the pre-Cold War era, where the Palestinian issue and apartheid in South Africa were seen as parallel struggles.

Third Nairobi International Conference on Women – 1985:

The Nairobi Conference, held at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, marked a pivotal milestone, characterized by the presentation of forward-looking strategies for advancing women's status until the year 2000. The conference focused on implementing the actions outlined in Copenhagen and assessing progress made. Its primary aim was to "enhance the global action plan to achieve gender equality and empower women." The most significant outcome was the unanimously adopted Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the

Advancement of Women, which emphasized the need to promote sustainable development and women's empowerment at all levels, laying the groundwork for the Beijing Framework.

The Nairobi strategies recognized new challenges such as violence against women, armed conflicts, and increasing discrimination in social and economic contexts. The conference delved deeper into poverty and development issues than previous conferences and saw increased representation of women from various social and political movements, including human rights activists, allowing for the exchange of diverse experiences.

The Nairobi Conference established specific mechanisms for implementation and monitoring**:**

1. Establishment of National Institutions for Women's Affairs: Governments were tasked with creating national institutions to address women's issues and develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the recommendations, including periodic reports.
2. Engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): The conference encouraged collaboration between governments and NGOs, enabling local actors to participate in monitoring and implementing processes.
3. Development of Performance Indicators: A set of indicators was created to evaluate progress in areas such as education, health, employment, and women's political participation.
4. Provision of Technical and Financial Support: Emphasis was placed on the importance of technical and financial assistance from developed nations and international organizations to support the efforts of developing countries in achieving gender equality.

Regarding Colonialism and Palestine:

> The Nairobi Conference continued discussions on colonialism and apartheid, placing these issues at the core of its debates. The conference acknowledged the multifaceted oppression faced by women in occupied areas such as Palestine, including military occupation: "The conference expresses deep concern over the appalling living conditions of women and children in occupied Palestine and other Arab territories, who suffer from foreign occupation, forced displacement, loss of land and property, and ongoing violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms."

There was a clear commitment to the Palestinian cause, emphasizing that the rights of Palestinian women were integral to global human rights. The conference called on the international community to support Palestinians in their struggle for national liberation and expressed solidarity with Palestinian women.

> The conference strongly connected the Palestinian cause with the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa: "It denounces the inhumane suffering of women and children under the apartheid system in South Africa and the Zionist regime occupying Palestine. The conference urges condemnation of these crimes against humanity, particularly against women and children." (p. 117)"[7]
>
> "Convinced that colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, racial discrimination, apartheid, foreign domination, the acquisition of territory by force, foreign occupation, attempts to destabilize governments, the arms race, and prejudices of all kinds impede the effective participation of women in all spheres of human activity. "

The Nairobi Conference highlighted the structural barriers faced by women, including the enduring effects of colonialism and conflict, and underscored the interconnectedness of women's rights struggles with broader movements for social and political justice. However, while the conference addressed colonialism, its emphasis on this issue declined compared to earlier conferences. For instance, colonialism was referenced 22 times in Nairobi, compared to 99 times in Mexico and 66 times in Copenhagen. This decline can be attributed to the growing influence of Western feminist movements and the negotiation processes dominated by their governments. Western feminist pressures, particularly from the United States, led to the removal of the term "Zionism" as a form of racism from the declaration, replacing it with the more generalized phrase "all forms of racism." The feminist agenda was thus shaped by these Western, namely American, influences. Additionally, the political landscape was reshaped by regional developments, such as the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel following the Camp David Accords.

> An example of this shift is seen in the statement by Kenya's representative during negotiations: "Following consultations during the break with concerned delegations, it is proposed to delete the words 'racism, Zionism' from the third clause of the proposed text and replace them with 'all forms of racism and racial discrimination.'" (p. 135)

Parallel conferences before Beijing: Population and Development Conference/ Cairo –1994:

The Cairo Conference focused on the links between population and development, emphasizing that improving women's lives and expanding their opportunities are fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Women's reproductive and sexual health rights were framed as fundamental human rights, marking a significant shift in the discourse on women's rights. The conference faced criticism for failing to represent women's voices, particularly those addressing post-colonial challenges. It was one of the first conferences to

[7] United Nations, Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women : Equality, Development and Peace, , Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985, https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.116/28.

separate personal rights from broader economic and political contexts, especially those linked to dependency and colonial legacies. Western perspectives dominated discussions, overlooking local experiences and specific challenges faced by women in developing nations. The proposed solutions were often incompatible with local contexts, neglecting the intersections of colonialism and gender and the impact of colonialism on women in particular.

Although the conference was organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with objectives centered on population issues, its influence on the approach and outcomes of the Beijing Conference surpassed that of previous women's conferences, from Mexico to Nairobi. This heightened impact can be attributed to the broader political context in which the conference took place—a year prior to Beijing—which significantly shaped the overall agenda of the United Nations. These dynamics will be further explored in the subsequent sections.

Beijing Conference 1995

Held from September 4–15, 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing took place during a period of heightened global interest in gender equality, building on the momentum of preceding conferences on human rights (Vienna 1993), population (Cairo 1994), and social development (Copenhagen 1995). The conference aimed to evaluate progress in implementing the outcomes of the Nairobi and Copenhagen conferences and to adopt measures to accelerate advancements in women's rights.

The conference resulted in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It identified 12 critical areas for focus, including education, health, violence against women, the economy, and decision-making. A central emphasis was placed on increasing women's participation in all areas of decision-making, particularly in politics and the economy, recognizing this as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving equality. Additionally, the conference addressed violence against women with significant seriousness, outlining action plans to combat all forms of such violence and enhance the legal protections available to women. *(Maran 1996; Roberts 1996)*

The conference underscored the critical need for adequate financial resources to support programs and initiatives aimed at promoting women's rights. It stressed the importance of fostering international cooperation between states and the United Nations to achieve these objectives. To ensure accountability and measurable progress, mechanisms were established for monitoring and following up on the implementation of the Platform for Action. Education and awareness were recognized as pivotal tools in advancing women's rights. Furthermore, integrating women into economic development was highlighted as a fundamental step toward achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. The conference also prioritized the needs of marginalized groups of women, such as refugee women and women with disabilities, reflecting its strong commitment to justice and equality for all. The Beijing Conference's outcomes remain a cornerstone of the global framework for advancing women's rights and

continue to shape policies and initiatives worldwide. The conference was notable for its candid discussions on previously taboo subjects and for achieving broad acceptance of equality provisions among UN member states, even though approximately 40 states declared reservations about specific parts of the declaration.

While the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represented significant progress on many fronts related to gender equality, it also signaled a retreat from several critical issues that had been agreed upon during the Mexico, Copenhagen, and Nairobi Conferences. Notably, it diminished the focus on issues relevant to the Global South, particularly those related to colonialism and its connection to women's rights. This shift marked a departure from earlier commitments to addressing these interconnected challenges.

While the Beijing Declaration represented progress, it also reflected a retreat from earlier commitments, particularly those addressing colonialism and Global South issues:

1. Gaps in Implementation: Although the Platform for Action outlined ambitious goals for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, its actual implementation at the national level remains insufficient. Many governments have made commitments without establishing effective mechanisms for follow-up, leading to slow progress in some areas and a complete lack of progress in others.
2. Cultural and Religious Resistance: Some countries expressed reservations regarding certain provisions in the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly those related to reproductive rights, gender, and women's autonomy. These issues were deemed controversial, especially in more conservative or religious societies, leading to limited or selective implementation of related commitments.
3. Ambiguity and Lack of Clarity: Despite the comprehensive nature of the Platform for Action, it has faced criticism for its ambiguity in certain areas, which has allowed for broad interpretations and weakened accountability. The use of non-binding language—such as "encouraging" rather than "obliging"—has further hindered the ability to measure tangible progress and hold governments accountable for their commitments.
4. Limited Resources and Funding: The lack of mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and ensuring adequate funding has significantly hindered the achievement of the objectives outlined in the Platform for Action. Without sustained financial support, many of the proposed reforms have remained aspirational rather than actionable.
5. Central Western Framework: The Beijing Platform reflects a Western-centered understanding of gender equality. It did not fully take into account the diverse cultural, economic and political challenges facing women in developing countries, marginalizing non-Western perspectives.
6. Focus on Globalization and Free Market Economics The Beijing Platform for Action promotes women's participation in the global economy but inadequately addresses the negative impacts of globalization on women, particularly in the Global South and

impoverished communities. Critical issues such as precarious or unsuitable work, the feminization of poverty, and exploitation within informal economies were not sufficiently addressed.

7. The Platform for Action, while addressing various dimensions of inequality such as poverty, education, and violence, did not adequately incorporate an intersectional framework. Intersectionality acknowledges how multiple social categories, such as race, social class, disability, and gender, interact to create overlapping systems of discrimination and oppression. Thus the experiences of many women remaind outside the international debate.

The Impact of Previous Women's Conferences on Shaping the Beijing Framework:

The Beijing Framework for Action (1995) is the result of a long evolution of the international community's efforts in promoting women's rights. Many of the ideas and principles discussed at previous conferences came to form the basis of the Beijing Framework. The following are some of the key points that contributed to the formation of this framework:

Equality, Development, and Peace: Earlier conferences increasingly emphasized these three principles as essential for progress on women's issues. The Nairobi Conference, in particular, focused heavily on the link between sustainable development and women's empowerment.

Strengthening International Protections for Women's Rights Through agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), reinforced during the Nairobi Conference, significant steps were taken to enhance the global legal framework for women's rights.

Reproductive Health and Women's Rights The Cairo Conference spotlighted reproductive rights as an integral part of human rights, profoundly influencing the Beijing Framework to incorporate sexual and reproductive health within its objectives.

Local and Global Action International conferences such as Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi emphasized the necessity of addressing both global and local challenges faced by women. This dual focus helped shape Beijing into a comprehensive framework targeting various issues affecting women worldwide.

Points of retreat and justifications:

Slower Progress Toward Gender Equality While international conferences established ambitious plans and strategies for gender equality, implementation encountered significant obstacles. Many countries struggled to fulfill international commitments due to political or social challenges.

Structural and Traditional Barriers In many societies, especially in the Global South, barriers persist that are not only cultural but also political and economic, hindering women's access to opportunities. Governments often justify non-compliance by citing respect for local customs and traditions, which can undermine the adoption of inclusive policies.

Neoliberalism and Its Impact on Women's Issues The dominance of neoliberal economic policies in recent decades has made addressing poverty and structural discrimination against women more difficult. Many governments adopted austerity measures that reduced social services, including those supporting women's rights. The Platform for Action did not explicitly critique these policies or connect them to the broader neoliberal framework.

Conflicts and Wars Armed conflicts and political instability significantly hindered progress toward feminist goals, disrupting programs aimed at promoting women's roles in development and peace. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action failed to prioritize these issues, particularly the root causes of conflicts and their connections to global systems of imperialism and colonialism, which were highlighted in previous conferences.

Sustainable Development in the Beijing Platform for Action As a concept and ideology, sustainable development in the Beijing Framework fails to critically examine its value for women and gender equality, or the ongoing exploitation of natural and human resources. Similar to the "Women in Development" (WID) approach, which overlooks the structural and ideological need to reimagine social and economic relations, sustainable development in its contemporary usage lacks deep critique.(Lliane Loots and Harald Witt 2005)

The emphasis on economic growth overlooks its impacts on social justice or gender equality, failing to address critical issues such as capitalist greed and models of development that exploit natural resources at the expense of local communities and the environment. To address these shortcomings, sustainable development must be reimagined to incorporate social justice dimensions, prioritizing women's empowerment and rights. A reimagined framework should reflect the diversity and nuances of women's experiences, accounting for the multidimensional impacts of economic, social, and cultural factors.(Lliane Loots and Harald Witt 2005)

Depoliticization of feminist struggles

Previous United Nations conferences, such as the Mexico City Conference (1975), explicitly highlighted the connections between colonialism, imperialism, and liberation struggles, including the Palestinian cause. At the Mexico City Conference, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 declared Zionism a form of racism, marking a radical stance in support of anti-colonial struggles. This resolution aligned with the broader anti-imperialist and liberation movements prevalent in the Global South at the time. These movements aimed not only to confront gender-based oppression but also to challenge overarching global systems of domination, including colonialism and apartheid, thereby emphasizing the inseparable link between gender equality and broader struggles for justice and liberation.

Difference in focus between previous conferences and the Beijing Conference (1995)

Colonialism and Zionism in Beijing Outputs: In earlier conferences such as Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi, discussions emphasized both direct and indirect forms of

colonialism, explicitly linking women's rights to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. For example, the Mexico City Declaration (1975) explicitly categorized Zionism as a form of racism, showcasing solidarity with the Palestinian cause and its alignment with global movements against colonialism, racial discrimination, and apartheid, including in South Africa.

Backsliding at the Beijing Conference: Unlike the conferences that preceded it, the Beijing Conference made no mention of colonialism, colonial dependency, or contemporary forms of colonialism, as though colonialism had been eradicated in the decade between Nairobi and Beijing. This notable shift reflected the influence of Western interests, which sought to obscure the enduring effects of modern colonialism and capitalist systems on the countries of the Global South, as well as the systematic violence these structures continue to inflict upon women.

The Beijing Conference marked a clear regression in addressing the Palestinian issue within the broader context of global struggles. For instance, the Mexico City Conference (1975) recognized settler colonialism in Palestine as a threat to world peace, whereas the Beijing Conference confined its position to referring to the occupation in Palestine as a threat solely to the lives of Palestinian women, overlooking the wider dimensions of the Palestinian struggle against colonialism. While discussions on the impact of colonialism on women persisted at the Nairobi Conference (1985), the debates at the Beijing Conference shifted towards framing women's rights from a Western liberal perspective. This approach obscured the relationship between modern colonialism and its economic and political repercussions on women in formerly colonized nations, while also disregarding the ongoing settler colonialism in Palestine.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, influenced by the Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, also failed to fully engage with the complexities of Palestinian women's rights. The Declaration largely ignored the structural and systemic challenges imposed by the occupation. It excluded the perspectives of Palestinian women who opposed the Oslo Accords, an agreement that the International Court of Justice later deemed illegal for failing to end the occupation. Furthermore, the Declaration dismissed the rights of Palestinian refugee women, who were completely excluded from its scope. Unlike earlier conferences, where Palestinian women's rights were embedded in the broader anti-colonial struggle, Beijing treated these rights in isolation, disconnected from the overarching context of occupation and systemic oppression.

Beijing : Draft Resolution II

Palestinian women

The Economic and Social Council,

having considered with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women,

Recalling the strategies adopted in Nairobi for the promotion of women, in particular paragraph 260 relating to Palestinian women and children,

Recalling also its resolution 38/4 of 16 March 1994 and relevant United Nations resolutions,

Recalling the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as it relates to the protection of civilian populations,

Welcoming the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993, as well as the implementation of agreements reached between the parties,

Expressing deep concern at the continuing deterioration of all aspects of the situation of Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem,

Expressing grave concern about the severe consequences of illegal Israeli settlement activities, as well as measures isolating Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, on the situation of Palestinian women and their families,

1. **Reaffirms that Israeli occupation constitutes a major obstacle to the advancement, self-reliance, and integration of Palestinian women into the development plan for their society;**
2. **Calls upon Israel, the occupying power, to fully comply with the provisions and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Hague Regulations, and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War;**
3. **Urges Israel to facilitate the return of all Palestinian women and children refugees, displaced persons, and those politically deported to their homes and properties in the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions;**
4. **Calls upon Member States, United Nations financial and specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant institutions to intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women for the establishment of projects that address their needs, particularly during the transitional period;**

5. **Requests the Commission on the Status of Women to continue monitoring and taking action on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, particularly paragraph 260 concerning Palestinian women and children;**
6. **Requests the Secretary-General to continue reviewing the situation and assisting Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit a report to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fortieth session on progress made in implementing this resolution.**

The Marginalization of the Palestinian Cause and the Shift in Beijing Towards Broader Globalization Concerns and the General Decline in the Feminist Agenda:

The Beijing Conference (1995) marked a clear shift away from the direct anti-colonial rhetoric that characterized earlier conferences, including discussions of the Palestinian cause. The focus in Beijing was more aligned with globalization, economic liberalization, and structural inequalities. However, these discussions often downplayed direct critiques of colonialism or national liberation struggles, such as that of Palestine. The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized broader goals for achieving gender equality, particularly within economic development, health, education, and political participation. While issues like violence, poverty, and inequality were addressed, they were framed in more universal terms, often ignoring the lens of anti-colonial resistance or the specific geopolitical contexts, such as Palestine.

Despite acknowledgment of the Palestinian struggle by many delegations, the Beijing Conference did not address Palestine with the same vigor as previous conferences. The focus on gender equality in Beijing leaned towards global economic justice, healthcare, and human rights, treated as universal women's issues, rather than linking them explicitly to colonialism and imperialism.

This represented a depoliticization of feminist struggles, reducing the emphasis on the direct intersections of gender with imperialism and colonialism that had been central to earlier conferences. In contrast, earlier conferences were more politically radical, explicitly supporting the Palestinian cause and broader anti-colonial movements. The Beijing outcomes reflected a new world order shaped by post-Cold War geopolitics, where economic liberalization and globalization dominated the global agenda. This context influenced how gender equality was framed, sometimes sidelining direct engagement with political conflicts such as Palestine.

Thus, the Beijing Conference signified a broader shift in focus towards issues related to globalization and development while reducing engagement with colonialism or national liberation movements. This transformation reflected the changing global political landscape of the 1990s.

Changes in the development of feminist theory

The changes reflected in the Beijing Conference outcomes raise profound questions about their alignment with feminist theory, particularly concerning women from the Global South. While Beijing produced significant outcomes, its shortcomings lay in ignoring the unique challenges faced by women in the Global South. The dominance of Western dimensions tied to the political and economic interests of the new global order further marginalized these women. Moreover, this divergence highlighted a gap between the theoretical advances in feminist thought and the practical implementation of international programs addressing women's issues, whether in development or rights-based contexts.

This contradiction is particularly striking given that feminist theory, since the 1970s, had embraced greater plurality in analyzing structural and institutional dimensions affecting women's lives. However, this plurality was not reflected in the Beijing outcomes, which emerged from negotiations dominated by a Western feminist perspective closely aligned with global political powers. As a result, the outputs of Beijing and its process reflected a narrow vision that overlooked the theoretical advancements and the complex realities faced by women globally.

The Beijing outcomes demonstrated a clear Western feminist hegemony that marginalized alternative feminist perspectives, especially those from the Global South. Issues such as neo-colonialism, extreme poverty, and structural violence—central to Global South feminisms—were deprioritized in favor of goals more aligned with Western interests. This reflected the dominance of liberal feminist ideals, which universalized women's experiences and framed rights as homogeneous demands applicable across diverse cultural and economic contexts.

The rights dimension and the generalizing perspective that formed the core of liberal feminist thought at the beginning of the twentieth century were challenged by Marxist feminist theory, which linked capitalist ideology to patriarchy. Marxism addressed the intersection between the capitalist world system and the patriarchal system. While this perspective is significant, it remains generalized in its treatment of patriarchal thought as a singular system with universal interests. This generalization was critiqued by feminists from the Global South, such as Denis Kandiyoti, who emphasized the importance of analyzing governance systems or political projects in relation to economic frameworks within specific regions, to achieve an accurate understanding of the particular patriarchal structures developed in those contexts.

The disagreement between the liberal and Marxist perspectives was reflected in the agenda of the first three conferences. As evident from their outcomes, as previously mentioned, the negotiation process was not unilateral or tied to a single center of power, as was the case with the outputs of Beijing. Instead, it was influenced by the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States and their respective alliances globally. Consequently, the alliance between Marxist women, feminists, and women from the Global South, along with the formation of strong coalitions that interconnected colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, had a significant impact on making the outcomes of the earlier conferences more pluralistic. This pluralism was evident in their vision of women's issues and the approach to gender-based analysis.

For example, the Copenhagen outcomes demonstrated a profound analysis of power dynamics and structural and institutional dimensions, as discussions began to focus on the intricate relationships between gender, social classes, and race, illustrating how these factors intersect to shape diverse women's experiences. This depth of analysis also resonated in the Nairobi deliverables, which provided more specific and precise recommendations regarding the process of intersectionality. Within this framework, feminist thought, which began to take shape through the voices of Black women and women from the Global South, alongside the alignment of many feminist movements with liberation movements and the support of the Soviet Union, collectively brought the feminist agenda in United Nations conferences closer to reality. This was achieved through the inclusion of pluralistic visions and the ability to negotiate within a relatively balanced power dynamic, resulting in outputs that were more reflective of the local, regional, and global contexts influencing women's issues.

Theoretical developments around gender, which evolved alongside socialist feminist thought, have played a crucial role in transformations within feminist theorizing, particularly influencing the outcomes of the first three women's conferences. In Nairobi, however, the depth of utilizing gender as an analytical tool became evident, shaping determinants and outcomes that addressed discrimination not only between men and women but also among women themselves, based on the varying organizational structures and power dynamics of political, economic, and cultural systems. This perspective rejected the previous dichotomy of "civilized" (meaning Western) versus "uncivilized" (everything outside the West), instead situating roles, values, and concepts within cultural contexts determined by relationships of power and control, and the interplay of political, economic, and cultural structures. Gender, therefore, emerges as a determinant influenced by the interrelation of these structures, advancing an understanding of gender as a social, cultural, political, and economic construct. The intersection and relationship among these dimensions are what shape the gender identity of women and men, their roles, and the values attributed to each of their roles.

This analytical shift brought about a radical transformation in feminist thought, enabling a framework that considers gender as a defined construct interacting with other structures and varying across contexts. For instance, gender intersects with race, but its dynamics within

each racial group vary due to different interactions with other structures such as class. The intersectional approach to gender and other frameworks underscores its role as one of many influencing factors in women's lives, rather than the sole determinant. While conferences like Copenhagen and Nairobi reflected elements of this approach, it notably receded in the Beijing outcomes, where "gender" was often treated as synonymous with "women" or used ambiguously without reflecting the theoretical advancements that positioned gender as a structural construct capable of generating analytical tools.

Engaging with this type of theorizing around women's issues demonstrates the potential for feminist thought to adapt and drive meaningful impact, leveraging diverse and historical experiences of women globally to foster a more just and inclusive future. However, feminist thought remains subject to the prevailing political and economic conditions. Despite advancements in feminist ideas and their ability to capture diverse realities and disparities among women—including the importance of issues like impoverishment policies, residual colonial effects in the Global South, neo-colonialism, and free-market economies—the Beijing Platform for Action and its framework were shaped by the dominance of the global system and the reinforcement of Western liberal feminist thought.

Liberal feminism left its imprint on the Beijing outcomes, marginalizing other feminist frameworks. This marginalization extended beyond the Beijing Platform to subsequent outcomes, including annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and follow-up conferences such as Beijing +5, +10, +15, and others. The Beijing Platform for Action, intended as a reference framework for the UN system and its mechanisms, also influenced the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, among other initiatives. For example, the contradictory uses of "gender" in the field of gender and development can be traced back to Beijing. The way "gender" was used in the Beijing Platform led to its depoliticization, sacrificing feminist ambitions in policy-making in favor of institutional uses of gender, such as increasing women's representation in decision-making positions. Consequently, "gender" became synonymous with "women" rather than being recognized as a societal construct interconnected with political and cultural dimensions. "Gender sensitivity" can be interpreted by non-feminists as an encouragement to use gender-disaggregated statistics in development planning, without taking into account the relational aspects.(Baden and Goetz 1997)

The marginalization of intersectional feminist ideas, which advocate for understanding the interplay of various identities such as race, class, and gender in shaping individual experiences, further highlights the limitations of the Beijing outcomes. Instead of treating women as a homogeneous group, intersectional feminism acknowledges the diversity of experiences and specificities, contributing to the development of effective strategies to address varied challenges. The decline in the feminist agenda, as reflected in the Beijing context, is closely tied to ignoring feminist thought beyond Western perspectives and,

consequently, overlooking the issues of women in the Global South and women from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In summary, this decline contrasts with the theoretical advancements in feminist thought. While Beijing's outcomes and subsequent CSW sessions show a regression, feminist perspectives have grown in diversity and depth. New directions in feminist theory have emerged, enhancing classical theories like Marxist feminism and broadening the understanding of the multifaceted challenges women face in various contexts. Theorists of post-colonial feminism and intersectionality, born from the struggles of Black women and women in the Global South, address complex realities such as how economic, political, social, and cultural factors impact women's lives.

These theories seek to address the complex issues facing women, addressing how economic, political, social, and cultural factors affect their status. Marxist feminism, for example, highlights the intersection between capitalism and gender injustice, noting how the economic system can affect women's lives in indirect ways.In contrast, postcolonial theory is based on the idea that colonialism still has profound effects on women from colonized nations, perpetuating forms of discrimination and exploitation. This theory seeks to examine how neocolonialism reproduces knowledge and power, and how these dynamics influence women's experiences in those contexts.

The Relevance of the Beijing Framework Amid Global Political and Economic Shifts

The report underscores two key issues: the regression in the feminist agenda within the UN context since Beijing and the inadequacy of Beijing's achievements in addressing emerging challenges, including neo-colonialism, modern capitalist policies, and neoliberalism, all of which significantly affect women in the Global South.

The rights-based discourse, without sufficient attention to structural, material, and power-related resources, remains one of the primary reasons for persistent gender inequality worldwide, despite three decades of UN commitments to achieving gender equality. Since(Desai 2005) Beijing, most feminist movements, including those of religious women and fundamentalist governments, have adopted the rights framework for advancing their claims at both local and global levels. Consequently, issues like violence against women, reproductive rights, livelihoods, housing, education, and sustainable development have all been framed within women's rights. (Ibid)

The emphasis on rights discourse coincided with the dominance of neoliberal rhetoric and structural adjustment policies, which can coexist since rights can be framed without challenging neoliberalism, as demonstrated in much of the UN's work. Countries were expected to fulfill their commitments to international financial institutions through privatization and reduced public spending while simultaneously ensuring women's and girls' access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods. This prioritization of commercial obligations over human rights commitments has been evident in many governments' post-Beijing actions.

Despite the universal human rights rhetoric that claims all rights are indivisible and inalienable, political and cultural rights often take precedence over economic and social rights. The post-9/11 militarization further exposed the limitations of the rights framework in protecting the rights of communities targeted under the guise of counter-terrorism. Adopting a rights-based development approach by international aid agencies and multilateral financial institutions has diluted the language and principles of human rights, failing to meet their intended goals.

Rights Framework and Global Political and Economic Changes

Since 1990, the world has undergone significant political changes with far-reaching effects on the international landscape. The end of the Cold War, marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, signified not merely a reconfiguration of relations among major powers but also the dawn of a new era of political and economic transformation. This transition brought about the emergence of new states in Eastern Europe, Africa, and other parts of the world. Many of these states, lacking adequate resources and infrastructure, have found themselves increasingly reliant on major powers, particularly the United States, often at the expense of their ability to make independent decisions.(Desai 2005; Obiora 1997)

The end of the Cold War brought a significant shift in the nature of conflicts, transitioning from wars between nations to internal armed conflicts within many newly established states, often accompanied by rising nationalistic and ethnic tensions. For instance, the breakup of Yugoslavia triggered civil wars in the Balkans and the formation of new nation-states, such as Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. These nations faced substantial economic challenges, increasing their reliance on Western support, particularly from the United States, which began to exert significant influence over their international decision-making. This influence is evident in these nations' voting patterns at the United Nations, where their positions frequently align with U.S. policies. Similarly, the shift from inter-state to internal conflicts was observed in cases like Rwanda in 1994, where ethnic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis resulted in a devastating civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and in Sudan, where internal conflicts deepened along ethnic and political lines. Many newly independent states, including the Baltic nations (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and Balkan states, became heavily dependent on American or European support. This dependency shaped their alignment with Western stances on key issues in international forums, particularly regarding human rights and economic policies.

These shifts significantly influenced the feminist agenda, particularly in the aftermath of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. During the negotiations leading to the conference's outcomes, a distinct division emerged between global conservative forces, which adopted hardline stances on women's rights, and Western liberal forces, which prioritized cultural dimensions over political and economic considerations in their discussions on women's issues. Consequently, the term "gender" in the context of development increasingly came to be synonymous with "women" or "formal equality," emphasizing

statistical representation rather than advocating for transformative changes in gender relations. For instance, in numerous UN documents produced following the Beijing Conference, the concept of "gender" was diluted to focus primarily on women's representation in governmental bodies and institutions. This shift came at the expense of addressing the underlying social and economic structures that perpetuate gender disparities, leaving broader systemic inequalities largely unchallenged.

These conflicts had a significant impact on successive economic crises since the 1990s, such as the 2008 global financial crisis, which particularly affected poor and developing countries by worsening economic conditions and increasing poverty levels. This coincided with austerity policies imposed by governments, negatively impacting social services and development. Alongside economic crises and conflicts, **climate change** has become a pressing issue demanding global attention. Increasing natural disasters, such as floods and wildfires, have raised awareness about the importance of sustainability. These natural phenomena are now an integral part of global challenges, requiring joint strategies, as they have disproportionate effects on women, who often bear the brunt of these crises. Three strategic goals in the critical area of women and the environment.:

Fourthly, the emergence of the term **"**global terrorism**,**" particularly after the events of September 11, 2001, led to fundamental changes in security and military policies in many countries. The United States used the concept of terrorism as a justification for its military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, granting these wars legitimacy under the banner of combating terrorism. These strategies not only affected international relations but also impacted migration policies, leading to stricter restrictions on the movement of refugees and migrants, resulting in changes to immigration laws and human rights. The relationship between terrorism and the revival of old concepts about Arabs, Africa, and others is evident in how these ideas are used as colonial tools and orientalist notions to reinforce control and influence over societies.

For a long time, Arabs and Africans have been depicted in orientalist literature as the "other," savage and uncivilized, which has reinforced negative stereotypes(Said 1993; Said’s 1978). With the emergence of the concept of terrorism after the events of September 11, these old portrayals were employed to interpret and classify groups and individuals, contributing to their stigmatization as terrorists merely due to their cultural identity. Western governments, especially in the context of the wars on terror, relied on old narratives that reflected fears of the "Arab threat." This justified military and colonial interventions, as Arab and Islamic countries were portrayed as danger zones requiring control to protect Western security**.** The emergence of terrorism as a global phenomenon coincided with the strengthening of structural racism, where old concepts were exploited to justify laws and policies targeting migrants and refugees from conflict-affected regions, thereby creating an environment of fear and discrimination.

The rise of the concept of terrorism legitimized many new colonial policies, using it as a pretext for military interventions in Arab and African countries, framed as part of the war on terror.(Abu-Lughod 1998) This led to the re-production of Orientalism within media and political institutions, which employed orientalist narratives to justify wars by presenting complex issues as simplistic battles between "good" and "evil." This process revived old Orientalist ideas, marginalizing the social, economic, and political complexities of the Arab and African worlds.(Abu-Lughod 2013)

Overall, these dynamics contribute to reinforcing new forms of colonial control, where concepts of terrorism are employed as tools to justify military interventions and repressive policies. This underscores the need to reevaluate these concepts and understand their impact on targeted communities. Consequently, these combined dynamics have created a new framework of global challenges, necessitating increased international cooperation and a thorough analysis of women's roles within these shifts and how they are affected by them. These issues demand strategic thinking that transcends traditional approaches to addressing political and economic crises, highlighting the need to incorporate an anti-colonial feminist perspective into international decision-making on women's rights.

The impact of globalization and neoliberal economic policies on women's issues manifests in several negative dimensions.

Impoverishment policies and inequality: Reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015 was one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, and countries in the Global South witnessed a widespread implementation of poverty reduction programs, with donors adopting various forms of social conditionality to promote poverty alleviation. At the same time, the issue of women's poverty gained increased attention in policies and was identified as one of the priority areas in the Beijing Conference. The current focus on this issue was welcomed due to the significant gender-based gap. However, these programs raise several concerns. The first issue is whether these responses are desired by women in the Global South or sufficient to meet their needs. The scope of poverty alleviation programs can be interpreted as evidence of the failure of development policies, raising serious concerns about whether sustainable pathways out of poverty are being or can be offered in the absence of appropriate measures addressing the structural issues linked to neoliberal policies. These policies have exacerbated poverty and gender inequality in the Global South. As women often bear a greater burden of poverty, which affects their access to education and healthcare, these policies, as feminist thinker Chandra Mohanty notes, have resulted in a global apartheid system between the Global North and the Global South.

Exploitation in Informal WorkMany economic globalization policies have pushed women into informal and unprotected jobs, making them vulnerable to exploitation, in addition to poor and inappropriate working conditions . These jobs do not provide women with any labor rights, depriving them of job security and benefits. Consequently, there is growing concern

about poverty alleviation programs relying heavily on unpaid or low-paid work performed by women to achieve their goals. While the increased presence of women in various industries may be seen as a positive step, it does not necessarily represent progress if their roles are reduced to caregiving and motherhood without addressing their concentration in specific roles and the limited development of their career trajectories.

Focusing on Women's Workforce Integration and Increasing Their Numbers: Economic policies tied to development programs have focused on increasing the number of women in various jobs without considering or creating a suitable environment for women, nor addressing the social realities or working towards their transformation. Consequently, work as a tool to achieve economic goals, such as poverty reduction, reflects a significant neglect of fundamental rights closely linked to social justice issues. This approach has often reinforced traditional gender roles rather than challenging them, entrenching structural inequalities. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an approach that ensures these programs neither exploit women nor increase their burdens, but instead meet their needs and enhance their economic and social independence.

Reduction of Social Support: Within privatization policies, the role of the state in providing social protection and care has been diminished, leaving women solely responsible for family care without sufficient support. This increases their burdens and negatively impacts their mental and physical health. Consequently, women's participation in the labor market without protective policies or care programs has led to an increased workload on women, often resulting in their withdrawal from the workforce in favor of family caregiving roles.

Increased violence and discrimination: The economic pressure resulting from globalization is one of the factors contributing to the increase in violence against women, both in the home and in the workplace, in addition to the prevalence of discrimination in all aspects of life. It has also given rise to new forms of discrimination and enslavement, for example against migrant domestic workers. Thus, solving the labor issue for one group of women resulted in forms of violence against another group.

Difficulty in accessing education and training: Although there are new opportunities, women in many countries in the Global South face significant obstacles in accessing vocational education and training, limiting their opportunities in the labour market. In addition, access to education and work is also still linked to other dimensions of social injustice, which are further entrenched as a result of the class gap in societies and access gaps related to housing between rural and urban areas , as well as women who do not have citizenship rights in the countries in which they reside, making access processes that still reflect systematic discrimination against groups of women.

Imbalance in the labor force: Globalization has increased the capacity of large corporations to exploit women, as many companies prefer to hire women at lower wages, resulting in wage

disparities and discrimination in rights, benefits, and working conditions. For example, women in free industrial zones in the Global South endure harsh working conditions. These zones primarily employ women due to men's reluctance to accept the lower financial returns offered. Consequently, the workforce in these zones is predominantly composed of women or migrant laborers, both of whom are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination within these settings.

Weakening trade unions, community, and political work: Globalization, which relies on cheap labor and denies workers fundamental rights such as job security and health benefits, creates an environment where the presence of trade unions can threaten the interests of major corporations. Consequently, neoliberal economic policies often result in the weakening of trade unions, making it difficult for women to organize and advocate for their rights. This erosion of union strength is particularly evident across the Global South, where governments have enacted laws to curtail the role of trade unions and civil society organizations. The absence of strong civil society structures facilitates the implementation of economic policies favoring large corporations, often at the expense of individual citizens and even the broader interests of the countries themselves.

Consumer orientation: Globalization has amplified the culture of consumption, playing a significant role in shaping individuals' choices and behaviors. Major companies, for instance, often create and perpetuate new standards, such as those defining women's beauty or men's power, which are predominantly rooted in Western perspectives and are reproduced to sustain consumption. These beauty standards, for example, exert immense pressure on women to conform to specific ideals of appearance or success.

Challenges associated with climate change: Climate change is the result of the accumulation of industrial activities, and causes significant negative impacts on the environment, especially in poor countries with weak infrastructure and resources. These countries are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, floods and fires, leading to the destruction of farmland and increased poverty.

The relationship between climate change and neo-colonialism is represented in the economic and political dominance imposed by the major powers on poor countries, as the resources of these natural countries are exploited to meet the needs of the global economy. These policies reinforce economic gaps and further deplete the environment. Linked to neoliberal policies, these changes promote austerity policies that focus on the privatization of resources and public services, increasing the vulnerability of poor communities and reducing the ability of governments to respond to climate challenges. These policies disproportionately affect women, especially in the Global South, where they suffer greater social and economic repercussions. These policies pose a double threat to women's rights: on the one hand, they exacerbate social and economic marginalization, and on the other, they increase the environmental burdens that women in particular bear, given their traditional role in caring

for the family and agriculture. Climate change, neo-colonialism and neoliberal policies are thus intricately intertwined to exacerbate the environmental and social exploitation of women in the Global South.

Influencing the feminist agenda:

All of the analysis presented in this report primarily explores the reasons behind the decline of the feminist agenda, with a focus on structural and postcolonial critiques of women's issues in the Global South. One of the most notable impacts has been the fragmentation of feminist solidarity among movements in the Global South. This lack of coordination between various feminist movements has resulted in the absence of clear strategies for joint action, which could have effectively highlighted disparities and differences in priorities while simultaneously establishing collective priorities tailored to the economic and political contexts of diverse regions.

The absence of solidarity and coordination has significantly weakened the feminist movement's ability to confront global challenges. This issue is closely tied to the influence of Western funding policies and the dominance of a select number of organizations over financial resources. These dynamics have redirected feminist priorities by focusing on specific issues, often emphasizing local dimensions at the expense of regional and global considerations. Additionally, they have fostered competition among women's organizations, further fragmenting collective efforts.

The following section examines the state of feminist solidarity in the Arab region, presented here both as an illustrative example and as a form of self-assessment.

Global Political Changes and Feminist Solidarity in the Arab Region

Feminist solidarity between Global South feminists and those who share their vision in the West is an urgent necessity these days, but it faces many problems that must be addressed. First, it must be recognized that feminist silence about what is happening in Palestine is not a mere disregard, but the result of a period in which feminists have been preoccupied with their local issues, with their organizations' struggles with states for survival, or even with their own personal struggles related to freedom of travel and movement. Feminists have also been divided according to their political positions on

events, and this difference is not wrong. Feminism is basically a political project, and it has never been separated from the projects of colonial states, the agendas of dictatorial regimes, or liberation movements.

However, it is unacceptable for feminists to remain immersed in their local issues only, considering that this priority is the solution at the current stage, especially since it is known that the problems of one country in the region cannot be solved without the other countries being affected. The political choices of Arab countries have historically been linked to each other, and within this interdependence, the paths of dealing with women's issues have been determined. Therefore, no local achievement for women can be achieved without strong links and continuous solidarity between feminist movements in the region, and continuous support for women's liberation issues globally.

Moreover, feminist solidarity cannot be discussed without reference to slogans that emerged at the end of the 1980s such as "Jordan First," "Egypt First," and"O Our Loneliness," which aimed to fight the slogans of nationalism and former Arab unity. These slogans strengthened regionalism and the Qatari state at the expense of regional mobility, as projects such as "Jordanization" and "Egyptianization" appeared, as well as attempts to divide the region into east and west, and neutralize the Maghreb countries from what is happening in the east.

At the same time, some countries continued to marginalize non-Arab ethnicities and call them minorities, despite being an integral part of the history and civilization of the region. This marginalization has isolated those groups from local and national issues. This situation has contributed to the creation of many challenges facing the region today, such as regionalism, sectarianism and tribalism, in addition to secession attempts aimed at forming small Qatari states that can only survive by relying on external loyalties, as shown in the relationship of South Sudan and some Kurdish movements with the United States, and the racist and settler regime in Palestine. However, these trends cannot be blamed without looking deeply into the reasons that led those movements to disengage from the issues of the Arab region.

Within this context, the Arab revolutions were unable to bring about the change required to confront the differences and divisions that were established in the colonial era, as these divisions were and still are part of the colonial strategies in the region, as happened in Africa, Latin America and Asia in general. Also, the repercussions of the Cold War era were not challenged, as the divisions in the region were based on dependence on one of the two global poles at the time, and this dependence had dire consequences for the region, as it sided with external projects instead of focusing on its own interests.

With the victory of the United States in the Cold War, its hegemony over the world was extended through globalization projects, and then neoliberalism and its various programs supported by transnational corporations. This led to a reduction in the role of the Qatari state in favor of the dominance of these companies, and the dependence shifted from direct domination of Western countries to dependence on these companies, including

financial institutions that have greatly affected the economies and policies of countries in the region.

Western human rights and feminist organizations have participated in entrenching subordination by imposing their conditions on civil society organizations as a result of dependence on external funding, which has led to determining the nature of existing programs and partnerships between organizations in different countries, sometimes within the same country. In contrast, the role of international and regional opposition women's organizations such as the International Women's Union and the Arab Women's Union has declined due to the fact that many of these unions have relations with countries, such as Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. At the same time, local alternatives have emerged that are small in size and influence but are supported financially and informatively from abroad. Although these institutions have focused on important and pivotal issues, they have not been able to protect themselves by strengthening their relations with the communities they serve, and therefore their impact has been limited to individual issues and has not been linked to the reality of the political, social and economic situation comprehensively, which has prevented them from producing holistic and alternative programs capable of facing challenges. This left them vulnerable to attack without public support to stand in solidarity with them in the face of threats.

Feminist organizations alone cannot be held responsible for this situation without looking at the reality in which these organizations work. States have contributed to determining the mechanisms of their work by restricting the work of organizations through the laws of civil society organizations, which have imposed restrictions on their activities, as happened in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and others. This local situation was in turn reflected at the regional level, where today we see a decline in the work of women's organizations regionally, especially with regard to the political demands of women's movements in the Arab world.

This analysis is not new, but the aim is to shed light on the conditions in which feminist organizations operate and the challenges they face, and to investigate the possibility of addressing these challenges collectively. Solidarity and joint feminist action at this point is essential, not a luxury. Fighting all forms of discrimination against women is not just a national issue, but a national issue, as what happens in an Arab country is reflected in the local dimension in other countries, and this must establish a strong form of solidarity and collective movement, especially in light of the frustration resulting from the outcome of the Arab revolutions and the restoration of totalitarian authority in most countries of the revolutions.

In light of the current reality and the genocide we are witnessing in Gaza and the involvement of the majority of the ruling regimes in the Arab region and the world, great responsibilities fall on the shoulders of feminist organizations that have preserved their historical legacy in the struggle for justice and equality. This struggle must be accompanied by the fight against all forms of economic and political dependence and corruption resulting from this authority. It is essential that these organizations find the

necessary tools and mechanisms to rebuild feminist solidarity globally. Promoting feminist solidarity globally would restore the feminist agenda to the state of solidarity between feminists from the Global South and those who support them from the North. This requires a feminist agenda that proceeds from the public interest rather than the private interest of organizations, national or personal interests, and sets priorities to combat all forms of oppression.

Conclusion:

Towards a feminist agenda against modern neoliberalism and the manifestations of past and current colonialism

The Beijing Conference came as one of the important milestones in the global feminist movement, as some of its outputs constituted a shift in the orientations of the feminist agenda: the conference focused on issues such as women's empowerment, equality of economic opportunities, and reproductive rights, but within the framework of neoliberal policies that made women's empowerment a goal for achieving economic growth rather than achieving comprehensive social justice. This trend has made feminist issues linked to global neoliberal policies, marginalizing issues of concern to women in the South, such as poverty, colonialism, and economic justice.

There is no doubt that significant changes, many of them positive, have taken place since the first World Conference on Women in 1975, especially with regard to the social and economic status of women. Almost all key indicators indicate that the world has seen progress towards greater gender equality. For example, girls' enrolment rates in basic and secondary education have risen rapidly around the world, reducing or even reversing the gender gap in school enrolment in some countries (UNESCO, 2015). Illiteracy rates among women have also decreased, and more women have access to higher levels of education. Women's longevity indicators also improved in most countries, and health indicators continued to improve. Reduced fertility rates and increased contraceptive use in many developing countries have reduced the risk of maternal mortality and eased the burden of unpaid work, which often falls on women and girls. With few exceptions, women's participation in public life has increased in all countries, whether in the political sphere, in the labour market, or within waves of international cross-border migration. (Molyneux and Razavi 2005)At the same time, there have been differences in improving the conditions of women, whether between different countries, or even in one country. Women in Western countries still enjoy privileges that women in the Global South have not enjoyed. Women from the rich classes also enjoy different and advanced health, economic and educational conditions than women from the middle and poor classes can reach. There are still noticeable differences between women in the countryside and urban women. For example, the rights of refugee women and those in camps and during periods of war and emergencies are limited to incomplete rights related to the living dimensions of food and housing at the expense of their political and economic

rights. So indicators of progress in the case of women usually do not reflect the state of substantive equality of women and among women themselves.

One of the most important challenges the report has focused on is challenging the one-sided vision in addressing women's issues since the Beijing Conference. At the first World Conference of Women held in Mexico City in 1975, there was a process of competition over who should set the priorities of the conference and its criteria the feminist agenda. This competition continued at the second conferences in Copenhagen in 1980 and in Nairobi in 1985. This competition for setting the agenda had a great impact on the outcomes of these conferences, as opinions differed on the priorities and issues to be addressed. This reflected the diversity of voices and interests in different issues for women from different parts of the world.(Obiora 1997) Although this discrepancy was also found at the Beijing Conference, the agreed work program and outputs in general were unilateral and did not take into account women's issues in the Global South, and worked to change the approach based on social and economic justice to the human rights approach, as previously detailed.

The decades since the Beijing Conference have witnessed developments that require new ways of thinking, working and formulating priorities at the level of the agenda and the feminist movement, which can be summarized by the following:

Under the hegemony of neoliberalism, feminist solidarity has experienced profound transformations, with certain feminist movements in the Global North retreating from their support for liberation and resistance movements in the Global South. This withdrawal emerged in response to the political and economic pressures imposed by the post-Cold War New World Order, which redefined feminist priorities to align with the objectives of free-market policies and globalization.

The influence of feminists from the Global South: Despite these pressures, feminists from the Global South have played a pivotal role in reshaping international feminist agendas. They have persistently advocated for the integration of issues related to decolonization, social justice, and resistance to neoliberalism within international forums. However, their influence has been significantly limited by the dominance of neoliberal forces in shaping international policies and decisions. The funding agenda has been one of the primary tools used to constrain the work of feminist organizations from the Global South, restricting their ability to engage in genuine feminist solidarity.

The political and economic transformations previously mentioned have profoundly influenced the issues championed by feminist movements, with neoliberalism emerging as a dominant force shaping international policies. This shift has reoriented many feminist priorities to align with new economic and political realities. Methods of feminist struggle and solidarity have been significantly affected, as evidenced by the lack of coordinated responses to events such as those in Palestine and Lebanon, the devastation in Sudan, Yemen, Libya,

and Syria, and the increasing restrictions on feminists and feminist organizations in Egypt, Jordan, and other countries. These developments highlight the absence of a unified voice for feminists in the Global South, particularly Arab women, in supporting one another. The current landscape also reveals a lack of collective and systematic denunciation of these crises, underscoring a decline in the international feminist solidarity that once had considerable impact.

The 1990s marked an era dominated by major powers and multinational corporations imposing their agendas, leaving women's issues in the Global South largely marginalized. For instance, the global development agenda, as represented by the former Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals, often addresses development from a narrowly economic perspective. This focus prioritizes metrics and economic growth over social and feminist dimensions, denying women access to basic rights and meaningful participation in development processes.

Within this framework, human rights have undergone a form of privatization that aligns with neoliberal policies and the extremism of states adopting conservative and right-wing stances on rights issues. Governments frequently pit individuals and groups against one another, attributing societal problems to specific segments, thereby deflecting criticism away from the state itself. Unemployment, for instance, is often attributed to the presence of women, migrants, or refugees rather than being acknowledged as a consequence of structural economic policies. This tactic is nearly universal; in Britain and other Western nations, media and right-wing groups promote the narrative that economic crises are tied to migrants. In reality, these crises are deeply rooted in their economic strategies, defense spending, and the wars they engage in, whether directly or indirectly.

To consolidate differences and maintain dominance, Western countries often produce ideologies hostile to Islam or any characteristic that might signify diversity, such as ethnicity or color. Within the Arab context, the propagation of masculine thought serves as the primary tool of discrimination, positioning women’s rights as inherently opposed to men’s rights, as though they are separate and contradictory. This policy of discrimination operates on the premise that the oppression of women benefits men; however, this supposed benefit is limited to a false sense of authority over women. This authority acts as a form of compensation for the broader lack of rights that men themselves experience, such as the freedom to criticize, freely express opinions, pursue professional or political growth, or achieve a dignified standard of living. Thus, the oppression of women is deeply intertwined with the curtailment of men’s rights, forming an integrated process. To sustain this system, however, society must perpetuate a policy of division between the sexes through hierarchical power structures and an inherent imbalance of authority.

Proposals for how to reach a feminist agenda free from racism and colonialism in its ancient and modern forms -Recommendations of the report:

One of the most important reasons usually put forward for not organizing a fifth conference for women is the fear of a decline in the feminist agenda as a result of the alliance between the so-called reactionary forces, which are the right-wing governments that rule the majority of the world, and governments that represent religious fundamentalism. The policies of these alliances directly follow the existing political and economic system and the economic interests it represents for Western countries.

This concern is rooted in undeniable realities, yet it overlooks the fact that the current feminist agenda, shaped by the Beijing Platform for Action, is also deeply influenced by the New World Order and the policies of globalization and neoliberalism. Consequently, the annual and follow-up conferences to Beijing have largely focused on supporting and reiterating its outputs without addressing the evolving political and economic conditions or the growing gap between Beijing's outcomes and the progression of feminist thought. As previously noted, these conferences have maintained the status quo in terms of indicators, commitments, and implementation tools, which have proven largely ineffective in achieving tangible progress for women. Any advancements have been mostly numerical, such as increased women's representation or access to services, without translating into substantive changes in the lived realities of women.

In light of this, the necessity of convening a Fifth World Conference on Women is evident. Such a conference must aim to redefine the feminist agenda by addressing the diversities and disparities among women through a structural perspective that counters the colonial lens. It should also link these differences to the challenges posed by the New World Order. Recognizing these differences is essential to highlight the varying impacts on women based on their geographical context—whether they reside in the Global North or South—and their intersections of race, ethnicity, disability, and other dimensions that exacerbate violence and discrimination and deepen their effects on women’s lives.

For this conference to succeed, it must be preceded by the establishment of strong feminist coalitions in the Global South, in collaboration with feminist groups in the Global North that focus on the issues of Black women, refugees, and other marginalized groups in the West who are affected by discriminatory and racist policies. These coalitions would bolster feminist movements and foster deeper connections between them, facilitating the creation of a unified feminist agenda for action within the UN framework and beyond, while also opening new avenues for coordination and activism.

The choice of venue is equally critical to the success of the conference. Holding the event in cities like New York or Geneva risks perpetuating the status quo, as these locations are more

accessible to women from the West than those from the Global South. This could result in Western women's voices dominating discussions and negotiations, thereby maintaining their influence over the feminist agenda. A more inclusive venue is essential to ensure balanced representation and equitable participation.

Another significant issue is the need to critique the dominance of Western feminist movements over the agendas and outcomes of various international conferences. These movements often express an interest in the issues faced by women in the Global South while neglecting to address persistent problems within their own societies. They adopt a narrow perspective on the progress made in addressing women's issues in the West, assuming that women's rights there are more advanced. This leads to the imposition of Western models when advocating for women's rights in the Global South.

Most of these models focus on formal equality and increasing representation in decision-making positions, yet they overlook critical physical and economic dimensions that significantly affect broader issues of rights and justice. By failing to account for these foundational aspects, these movements risk promoting solutions that do not fully address the lived realities of women in diverse contexts, particularly in the Global South.

Most Western feminist bodies also overlook two key issues:

The responsibility of Western countries for the state of rights in the Global South stems from their economic policies, control over resources, and influence on political decisions in these regions, which have a profound impact on the lives of women in the South. Therefore, any Western organization that fails to take this responsibility seriously should not have the right to influence the feminist agenda and must be confronted and neutralized.

The majority of feminist and human rights organizations in the West fail to recognize that their vision of rights and development for women often excludes the diverse realities of women within their own societies. These organizations tend to overlook the factors of discrimination and racism faced by women in these countries, whether due to class, race, ethnicity, or religion.

Thus, the feminist agenda that must be pursued should critically engage with Western feminist agendas and establish clear parameters for their participation in negotiation and discussion processes. This includes recognizing that ready-made models derived from Western contexts often have negative impacts in the Global South. Furthermore, Western feminist movements must evaluate their relationships with their own countries and acknowledge their role in producing policies that subject women in the Global South to various forms of violence and structural discrimination.

The feminist agenda to be pursued should also recognize the hierarchical relationships that have developed among feminist movements, whether within the same country or between

different countries. This requires feminist movements to reflect on their contribution to discrimination and the marginalization of diverse women's issues within their societies. Local and regional alliances play a critical role in fostering balanced relationships and collaborative work programs among women with diverse backgrounds and interests. This includes alliances with movements representing migrant women, trade union members, agricultural workers, refugees, and others.

To develop a feminist agenda aimed at radical change, it is essential to critically examine the condition of women in different countries using contemporary frameworks that challenge those currently promoted within the context of the United Nations. These frameworks should prioritize the actual experiences of women over merely statistical dimensions, creating a model that accounts for economic and political contexts.

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