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[the ISSUES](#)
[the LEADERSHIP](#)
[about USUN](#)
[about the UN](#)

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## Statement by Ambassador Meryl Frank, Deputy U.S. Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women, at the Commemorative Event for Beijing+15, in United Nations Conference Room 1

*Ambassador Meryl Frank, Deputy U.S. Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women*

New York, NY

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### AS PREPARED

Thank you. The United States applauds the progress made to improve the status of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women. We recognize, however, that there are still significant obstacles to progress.

We welcome the opportunity to highlight some of those challenges. Some obstacles to the well-being of women and girls – including poverty, lack of education, and maternal and child health – remain to this day. But new challenges have arisen, such as increased efforts to exploit persons through human trafficking, rising rates of HIV/AIDS, and rape as a weapon of war.

A priority of the Obama Administration is to advance maternal and child health. Each year over half a million women die in childbirth because of complications for which effective and low-cost treatments exist. The U.S. Government has partnered with member states, non-governmental organizations, and others to reduce the number of maternal deaths. We have lowered the rate by 30 to 50 percent in several Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries. To improve further on these results, governments need to increase women's access to skilled birth attendants who can address complications during pregnancies, and to ensure that sufficient drugs and other necessary supplies are available to prevent and treat obstetric complications.

Progress has been made to increase access to education. The ratio of girls to boys in schools has increased. But girls often drop out of school because they are forced to marry early or because they must work to help support their families. Our task is to address factors that prevent girls from completing their educations.

The Beijing Platform of Action recognizes that de facto as well as de jure discrimination against women must end. As women continue to lack access and control over resources, it is essential to enact and enforce laws that guarantee women's right to own and inherit land and property. The UN has adopted resolutions that address this topic, including a 2005 resolution at the former Commission on Human Rights. A mechanism is needed to examine discriminatory laws against women from a multi-disciplinary perspective and to provide technical assistance to member states to address the issue. The consensus adoption of the resolution on "Elimination of Discrimination Against Women" at the September 2009 Human Rights Council session was an important first step in this regard. The United States hopes that efforts will continue that will result in the creation of a new mechanism.

While rape in conflict situations is hardly a new phenomenon, Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1880, 1888, and 1889 have called attention to the particularly egregious situation of systematic or mass rape as used by military forces in order to advance their military or political objectives. These resolutions emphasize that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens. When governments become perpetrators rather than protectors, their citizens have no recourse within their own country.

We welcome the appointment of Margot Wallstrom as Special Representative to coordinate efforts to end sexual violence in armed conflict situations. We also appreciate the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNDP to deploy teams of experts to help governments take measures to end sexual violence in conflict-related situations, improve accountability, and end impunity. A further step needed is to increase the number of women in peacekeeping and peace-building operations. Women's inclusion in security forces inspires confidence among the women they serve and encourages victims to report sexual and gender-based crimes.

The issue of HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects women and girls. It is the leading cause of death of women ages fifteen to forty-four worldwide, and gender-based violence is a major cause of increased risk of HIV infection. With its prevention, treatment, and care programs, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is an example of a government program that takes a comprehensive approach to gender. It examines a range of issues, including the role of men and boys; the impact of gender-based violence; and the need for integrated health services that allow women comprehensive care that includes services like family planning, HIV testing, and pregnancy care. Moving forward under its new strategy and as part of the President's Global Health Initiative (GHI), PEPFAR will increase its investments in programs that strengthen country-specific gender responses.

Human trafficking at the time of the Beijing women's conference was not widely recognized as a crime. We now understand that human trafficking affects both individuals and societies. Trafficking not only traumatizes the victims physically and psychologically, but also threatens the public health, strains social services, and encourages organized crime. To help those subjected to trafficking, we need to improve their access to victim services and to ensure that they are able to reintegrate into society. Increased public-private

partnerships and a growing focus on corporate social responsibility help boost anti-trafficking capabilities.

In closing, let me reiterate the U.S. Government's support for reform of the UN's gender-related institutions. We urge member states to build on Resolution 63/311 and adopt another General Assembly resolution defining the entity's mandate, staffing and organization, how it will be funded, how it will coordinate with other UN bodies, and who it will report to. Although it may take considerable thought to resolve these issues, we must make the effort now. The sooner the unified gender entity is up and running, the sooner all countries will benefit. Developing nations will benefit from technical assistance which will bring improvements on the ground. All countries will stand to gain from the new entity's efforts to empower women by acting to increase their political participation, and upholding women's rights.

There have been tremendous accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women, but there are still significant challenges. We look forward to working together with other member nations to realize the promise of Beijing.

Thank you for your attention.

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