

STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JAN BEAGLE

ACCELERATING GENDER EQUALITY 25 YEARS AFTER THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

Thursday, 1 October 2020

Excellencies,

I appreciate this opportunity to contribute to the discussions at this High-level Meeting on Accelerating Gender Equality 25 years after Beijing.

I was fortunate to have participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and to have helped to organise the NGO Forum at Huairou - together and separately these two conferences were the largest ever sponsored by the UN at that time. They raised the consciousness of governments, international organisations and civil society alike about the importance of a gender perspective. And we can celebrate many achievements putting that into practice over the last 25 years. But, as an International Gender Champion and the mother of three daughters, I am also deeply aware that much is left to be done.

As Director-General of IDLO, the only global intergovernmental organisation exclusively dedicated to advancing the rule of law to promote peace and sustainable development, I know how critical justice and the rule of law are to achieving gender equality, and realising the commitments we made in Beijing.

Whether on paper or in practice, many women still do not have the same rights as men, to own and control land, register a business, confer nationality on their children or spouses, or participate in the political life of their community. More than a billion women still do not have legal protection from intimate partner violence.

The current pandemic has brought to the forefront the staggeringly wide gap of injustice and inequality that women face across the globe. Rising gender-based violence, curtailed access to justice institutions, discriminatory laws and growing injustice for women workers – including those on the frontlines of the crisis – are some of the major challenges to women's lives and livelihoods associated with COVID-19.

At IDLO, gender equality is at the core of our work. We promote and protect women's human rights, not only in courts and other formal institutions, but also in customary and informal systems. We work to remove barriers to the participation of women justice professionals; to eliminate laws that discriminate against women and girls; and most importantly, to help empower women to enjoy their rights as full members of the global community.

IDLO's experience is rooted in the everyday reality of women. Through our programmes and research, we have identified five 'gender equality accelerators':

First, we must address **discriminatory laws** - especially those relating to personal status and work, and those laws which permit impunity for gender-based violence.

This can be a difficult and sensitive process. However, the myths and stereotypes that hold progress back can be tackled through dialogue among stakeholders, about the realities of how discriminatory laws limit women's lives, their projects, their talents, and their ability to ensure their own safety and

health. IDLO seeks to support these dialogues. When societies see how equality benefits everyone, political will grows to eliminate discriminatory laws.

Secondly, States must invest in transparent and efficient **justice institutions**. In the disruption caused by the pandemic, we see even more clearly how women are disadvantaged and need access to justice institutions, for enforceable decisions to claim their rights. The pandemic also shows that change is possible, that our ways of living and the priorities for state investment can change radically and quickly. States should commit now to build on good practices mandated by international human rights law in creating institutions which respond to the needs of justice-seekers.

Third, we must ensure the **inclusion of women as decision -makers**. Women parliamentarians, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and legal aid providers play an important role in shaping the rule of law and justice agenda.

Fourth, we must engage strategically with **customary and informal justice systems**. IDLO research shows that women often seek solutions through customary justice systems which can offer advantages of accessibility and affordability. But some systems favour entrenched power inequalities, male-dominated structures and patriarchal values and result in discriminatory and harmful outcomes for women and girls. IDLO engages with customary and informal justice systems to sensitize them to the needs of women and girls and international human rights standards.

Fifth, we must **address the digital divide and explore alternatives** so poor women and those without access to the Internet can still access justice.

From Afghanistan to Myanmar, Kenya to Mongolia, Mexico to Tunisia, among others – we endeavour to enhance justice for women and girls.

In Tunisia, for example, we supported the development of a manual of procedures for women's shelters to provide concrete guidelines for survivors of gender-based violence.

In Afghanistan, we supported the Attorney General's Office in the establishment of the first specialized unit to investigate and prosecute gender-based violence. Today, our continued support has led to the development of functioning units in all provinces of the country.

In Mongolia, IDLO launched a public legal awareness campaign on gender-based violence and COVID-19, in print, social media, radio and TV outlets.

These are only a few of the examples of how investment in concrete programmes on the ground can help change the lives of women and girls and advance a culture of the rule of law. It is the right of women everywhere to be equal before the law and to have access to justice.

It is time for all of us re-commit ourselves to gender equality and women's empowerment – to pledge our support to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to act swiftly and decisively on our collective hope for a gender-equal future.

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.