

## UN forum on women celebrates progress in Asia-Pacific, notes challenges



A health worker examines an infant at a busy clinic in South Asia

16 November 2009 – Nearly 15 years after the landmark United Nations conference on women, countries in Asia and the Pacific have made tangible progress but obstacles and challenges remain, a meeting convened by the world body's regional arm heard today.

Participants are **meeting** at the Bangkok headquarters of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**) for a three-day review of the follow-up to the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, specifically to assess progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action – a wide-ranging blueprint for promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls.

"As we rejoice in the Platform's coming of age, the achievements and the progress, we must continue with its implementation and ask for accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment," said Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP. "Women must be legitimate participants in all spheres of public life – as leaders in government, businesses and the broader community."

While there are signs of progress since the creation of the agenda, including the nearly universal adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), persistent obstacles and challenges remain.

Joanne Sander, Deputy Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**), said, "Accountability is particularly crucial at this time. Who will answer for the painfully slow progress on reducing maternal mortality when it is entirely preventable? Who will answer for the inadequate progress in increasing women's meaningful political participation in most countries in the region?"

Carolyn Hannan, Director of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, emphasized accountability on the issue of violence against women. She highlighted the importance of

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women, and drew attention to the adoption by the Security Council of two new resolutions on sexual violence in armed conflict.

The opening session of the three-day review meeting drew about 250 delegates, including a number of ministers, and was opened by a trio of ESCAP musicians who performed the song, "Keep on Moving Forward," sung at the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Forum held at the time of the Beijing Conference in 1995.

The next two days of the meeting will focus on topics such as gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the pledges world leaders made to slash a host of social ills, including extreme hunger and poverty, infant and maternal mortality, and lack of access to education and health care – all by 2015, as well as CEDAW and a regional campaign to end violence against women.

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