CSO Statement Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; Gender Inequalities, Discrimination, and Violence; and Conflict
Delivered by Nalini Singh

On behalf of the Asia Pacific Beijing +20 CSO Steering Committee and representatives from other CSOs in the Asia Pacific Region

Thank you madam chair for this opportunity to speak. The Civil Society Steering Committee extends its appreciation to UN Women for the support and role in the review process for Beijing Platform for Action in Asia Pacific.

While progress has been made in addressing maternal and child health, we would like to emphasize that in addressing gender inequalities, discrimination and violence, we need to accept that women are not just mothers – we are women and girls of all ages and diverse sexualities and gender identities; women in diverse forms of family and relationships as recognised in the Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 29); women with or without children; women who are single, married, unmarried or widowed; women who are living with or are affected by HIV; women with different abilities and disabilities. We are women of different socioeconomic statuses, including migrant women and women belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities; women, in effect, of multiple and intersecting identities, with diverse health needs over the course of our lives.

The Beijing Agenda reaffirmed the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and that sexual and reproductive health and rights are key to advance women’s and girl’s human rights. Addressing inequalities to promote equal relationships between people in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for integrity of the person, requires mutual respect, consent and shared responsibilities for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

Gender-based violence continues to be endemic and constitutes an extreme violation of women and girls’ human rights. People across the region continue to face execution, imprisonment, torture, violence and discrimination because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, harmful traditional practices such as FGM and cutting and child, early, and forced marriage, often lead to early and unwanted pregnancies. Barriers in accessing comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services, including access to safe and legal abortion, hinder the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

Furthermore, a recent review of global datasets on conflicts around the world found that Asia has among the world’s longest running armed struggles, often lasting multiple generations and the onset of new conflicts is often simply the re-emergence of pre-existing conflicts. Our region also has the highest numbers of subnational conflicts. In conflict-affected communities in Asia Pacific, the experience of women bears testimony to the direct relationship between the discrimination they face based on their gender and their vulnerability to armed conflict. It is critical to recognise that women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination – such as indigenous women, women with disabilities,
widows, women from minority groups such as ethnic, religious and sexual as well as women human rights defenders – face heightened insecurity and vulnerability in conflict situations.

A conflict prevention and transformative approach to development is therefore critical to addressing root causes of conflict and promoting long-term sustainable development and peace. Governments need to support and strengthen women’s participation in conflict prevention, protection and relief and recovery efforts.

We believe that accountability must be rooted in the principles of human rights, empowerment, participation and transparency and that the same principles are applied in monitoring and regulating the role of private sector in health care and service delivery. In the same spirit we urge member states to ensure that health care systems are based on principles of universal access and free from privatisation.

As our final recommendation, strengthening the accountability of state and non-state actors for ensuring gender equality as well as ending impunity on gender-based violence to secure women’s and girls’ human rights, is vital. This includes accountability for gender budgeting, the full and equal participation of women in all forms of decision-making, governance and peace negotiations as well as conflict transformation and the scaling-up of women-led civil society.