

**BPFA at Risk**

In the last ten years, the BPFA has provided women with a minimum political platform for asserting and expanding their rights. Women's movements, nevertheless, know that the battle to realize the commitments have been an uphill climb from the outset. In 2000, women's movements saw a very thorny negotiation of the 5-year review of the BPFA when some governments began questioning their prior commitments. In March 2005, the international community will convene in New York to commemorate the 10 years of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). For sure the women's movements will be there as well, some coming from the sub-region of Southeast Asia on which this volume is focused.

There are big reasons for the women's movements to be anxious about with this forthcoming meeting. Overall, states have become exclusively preoccupied with the issues of national growth and security such that citizen's rights, including women's rights, and democracy have become mere appendages and footnotes in formal agreements. Moreover, the prevalent state discourse on development has become more narrowly focused on a minimum agenda of the Millennium Development Goals in which women's rights is threatened with further invisibility. Furthermore, women's rights are under direct attack by states that are controlled by conservative political forces which moralize and essentialize the unequal relations of the sexes. The heightened insecurity and confusion has created a fertile ground for intolerance and increased the propensity of states for social control everywhere.

This extremely complex and threatening environment calls for supporting women's leadership and power as a challenge and alternative to male-led political constructions of the state and processes of governance. But the immediate challenge lies in the ability of women's movements to recast how women's access to public power and leadership is understood and pursued. Integral to this is the repositioning of the strategy of women in politics within women's movements that are active, dynamic and radical and which are politically interlinked with other movements and progressive forces. The promotion of women's political rights and empowerment must also be

interlinked more firmly and consistently with the struggle for people's rights and justice. At all levels, the defense of the BPFA must be made together with the defense of other commitments to human rights, justice and freedom. Only then do women stand a chance at confronting systematic backlash reaction to women's rights coming from states and other political, economic and socio-cultural forces. Only then can the BPFA vision of the women's equal access to power and decision-making make a difference for gender equality, democracy and overall transformation.