

**DECLARATION BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS FROM THE  
COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (CIS)  
ATTENDING THE FIRST UNECE REGIONAL FORUM  
OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS**

We, the women entrepreneurs from countries in transition assembled at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 22 October 2001 for the First Forum of Women Entrepreneurs in the UNECE region, believe that the women's entrepreneur movement has become an integral part of international business life.

Thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) headed by women are successfully operating in domestic and international markets, turning out competitive, high-quality products.

Women bear and nurture their enterprises like their own children, with a solicitude and love that merits respect and veneration.

As representatives of SMEs in their countries, women are the hope and support of the State, which has not always understood them or offered them adequate support.

We in this room today, have resolved once again to urge our Governments to devote greater attention to women, who in many of our countries and indeed throughout the world comprise half the population, occupy low-status yet vital positions in public and commercial sector enterprises, and at the same time are responsible for the reproduction of the nation.

While our countries have been going through a difficult period of fundamental changes in social systems, we have demonstrated our ability not only to survive but also to create new enterprises and jobs and provide goods and services which can hold their own in terms of quality against similar products manufactured by our competitors abroad.

The time has now come for our Governments to offer more active support for all aspects of women's entrepreneurship. For the most part this means giving women entrepreneurs access to financial resources, government procurement contracts, intermediate goods and raw materials, market information and, lastly, modern technology. Such support is necessary not only to rectify the gender balance, which has become noticeably lopsided in the past decade, but also to raise the technical capacity and competitiveness of enterprises headed by women.

The need for such support is also particularly obvious as regards the situation of family, the younger generation and future generations.

We also appeal for the support of all international organizations and financial institutions, bilateral State development agencies and non-commercial and corporate funds.

We invite women from other countries in the region to collaborate, exchange experiences and join us as partners in joint projects that will ensure the gradual development of the region, dissipating social tension, averting conflicts and stabilizing the overall political situation.

We appeal to all women wishing to start a business who are finding it hard to put their ideas into practice:

Look at us attending this Forum. We too have had our doubts, have lost everything and started afresh. Many of us have had to manage without help from men, and while raising children. We have occasionally despaired, but we picked ourselves up again and fortune smiled upon us.

We have stayed the course and invite you to follow our example by setting up your own businesses, enlisting support from those with experience, and uniting behind, not personal ambition, but the realization that only together can we really succeed.

We have to understand that only success will make us a force to be reckoned with when the economic and social policy of our States is shaped.

We attending this Forum fully endorse ECE initiatives: creation of a cyber-market; enhancement of the e-capabilities of enterprises headed by women to enable them to participate in international e-commerce; establishment of an ECE Foundation of Women Entrepreneurs; and development of a regional network of women's business associations to help women entrepreneurs to gear their businesses to the demands of the third millennium.