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**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY HIGHLIGHTS NEW YORK CITY'S LEADERSHIP IN  
REDUCING GENDER INEQUALITY**

*Read the First Lady's op-ed on [flo.nyc](https://www.flo.nyc.gov)*

**NEW YORK**— In an op-ed in *The Guardian* today, First Lady Chirlane McCray speaks about New York City's work to advance the rights of women and girls. New York City was the first city in the country to join the UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative, and the First Lady signed the Memorandum of Understanding at the UN in November. The City is taking steps to make all public spaces free of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.

Yesterday, First Lady Chirlane McCray joined several de Blasio Administration commissioners at the March for Gender Equity and Women's Rights, and the Mayor and First Lady will host a Beijing +20 Reception at Gracie Mansion tonight.

Read the full op-ed below:

**Women are the future of cities – and New York City gives them the keys to empowerment  
by Chirlane McCray**

Twenty years ago, 17,000 representatives from 189 governments came together in Beijing for the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women. The challenges they faced were global, persistent and devastatingly urgent for all too many women.

Hillary Clinton, who was first lady at the time, made the stakes bracingly clear in an address to the conference: "As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes, the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized."

Over the course of two weeks, the delegates developed a Platform for Action that provided a detailed policy framework for protecting the rights every woman is entitled to, including her right to equal wages, her right to a good education and her right to full participation in government. The UN describes the Platform as humanity's most progressive blueprint yet for advancing women's rights around the world.

This week, leaders from around the world will gather in New York City for the Beijing+20 conference. They will review the progress of the last two decades and renew their commitment to the policies and principles laid out in the Platform.

While there is much to celebrate, our work is far from over.

When it comes to wages, at least 50% of the world's women have a paying job, which is up from 40% in the 1990s. But women still earn up to 30% less than men for doing the same work.

When it comes to education, every developing region in the world has achieved – or is close to achieving – gender parity when it comes to primary education. But the disparity widens as students grow older. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, there are still only 64 girls for every 100 boys in college.

And when it comes to government participation, the percentage of women in the world's parliaments has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. But men still comprise almost 80% of all parliaments and cabinets. The consequences of fewer women than men at the decision-making table are real, even in the United States. Last year, the US Senate, which was only 20% female at the time, blocked the act, which would have required employers to share information about pay differences and justify any wage gaps to employees.

Leaders of our world's cities cannot afford to be so indifferent to these injustices. By 2050, almost 80% of women and girls will live in an urban community. Smart city governments are embracing this sea change as an opportunity to lead the way on gender equity. As world leaders gather at the United Nations for Beijing+20, I invite them to take a closer look at how New York City is putting women at the center of our efforts to reduce inequality of every kind.

Under the leadership of my husband, Mayor Bill de Blasio, New York has developed a close working relationship with UN Women. Back in November, I had the honor of speaking at the UN and signing the document that made New York the first city in the US to join the Safe Cities Global Initiative. We are now taking steps to make all public spaces free of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. This work is supported by our Office to Combat Domestic Violence, which served more than 31,000 women last year at their Family Justice Centers.

But keeping women safe is only meeting the bare minimum of our obligation. New York City is also building on the blueprint laid out in Beijing by providing women and girls with the keys to empowerment. Our universal pre-kindergarten initiative, which started in September 2014, is giving more than 53,000 four-year-olds a head start on their education this year. We secured paid sick leave for 243,000 women, who will no longer have to choose between their jobs and their health. A remarkable 53% of the mayor's senior leadership team is women. In New York, women increasingly have an equal voice in decisions that will affect their lives.

New York isn't the only city making good on the promises made in Beijing. Back in 1998, San Francisco became the first city in the world to adopt UN-inspired legislation to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination, including in education, healthcare and employment. Cairo has since launched a pilot project to teach children about sexual violence using games and music. Vienna takes gender into consideration when developing any budget proposal or in urban planning, which has led to initiatives to improve lighting in city parks and revising day care curriculums to be more gender-aware.

Together, these successes provide a model to last the next 20 years and beyond. Now it's up to our leaders to provide the world's cities – and by extension, the world's women – with the support and partnership we need to turn local triumphs into global change.

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