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## **Commission on the Status of Women**

### **Fifty-fourth session**

1-12 March 2010

Agenda item 3 (a)

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

## **The evolving status and role of national mechanisms for gender equality**

### **Moderator’s summary**

1. At its 18th meeting, on 11 March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel on the theme “The evolving status and role of national mechanisms for gender equality”. Mr. Takashi Ashiki, Vice-Chair of the Commission, moderated the discussion. The panellists were: Ms. Rounaq Jahan, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka, Bangladesh; Senator Margaret Mensah-Williams, MP, Vice-Chairperson of the National Council (Upper House), Parliament of the Republic of Namibia; and Ms. Mary Rusimbi, Gender Specialist and Development Practitioner.

2. National mechanisms are key actors in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, there has been a growing diversification and multiplication of national mechanisms for gender equality, at different levels and branches of Government, as well as outside Government. In addition to the national machinery within Government, parliamentary committees and caucuses have been established. Independent advisory and expert bodies, such as equality commissions and councils, and ombudspersons, are in place in a growing number of countries. The increased diversity of national mechanisms for gender equality has also resulted in a greater

breadth of mandates, roles, functions and scope of work. Given this growing diversity, there is a need to better understand the functioning of these mechanisms and opportunities for enhancing synergies, cooperation and collaboration for greater impact.

3. National machineries within Government, which are sometimes at the level of a ministry, commonly have responsibility for preparing or updating and monitoring the implementation of gender equality plans, strategies and programmes; initiating gender equality legislation; and working on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. They are responsible for promoting, supporting and monitoring the incorporation of gender equality perspectives in all policy areas; building the capacity for gender mainstreaming in line ministries, including training and support for gender focal points; and the preparation of tools and other resources to support the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across Government. Such machineries also advocate for, and support improved collection of data disaggregated by sex and gender-sensitive indicators. Many work collaboratively with a broad range of stakeholders, in particular non-governmental organizations and women's groups. Political leadership, and technical expertise, are important factors that contribute to the effectiveness of national machineries.

4. National mechanisms for gender equality continue to face constraints and challenges in the implementation of their mandates, including inadequate human and financial resources. In some cases, national mechanisms are marginalized within the governmental structure and subject to frequent changes in organizational settings. Capacity for coordination, monitoring and accountability remains weak, and lack of political support also constrains their effectiveness. National mechanisms sometimes have to rely on donor support for their work, which raises concerns about donor dependency and sustainability.

5. Parliamentary committees and caucuses can play a leadership role in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, in particular by working for gender equality legislation, overseeing its implementation, and ensuring that gender perspectives are systematically integrated in all legislation. Parliament can also use its role in approving the State budget for promotion of gender equality. Parliamentary hearings involving the executive branch have been used successfully to assess progress and gaps in implementation. Establishment of "gender audit committees" could be explored to assess the gender sensitivity of proposed legislation and enhance accountability for outcomes. Collaboration among women parliamentarians from different political parties has also contributed to better results for women constituents. Good working relationships between parliamentary committees and the national machinery within Government are instrumental for accelerating effective parliamentary action for gender equality and women's empowerment. While all parliamentarians are responsible for the promotion of gender equality, having a significant number of women parliamentarians has shown to result in better outcomes for women.

6. Some national human rights institutions are increasingly taking an active part in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and national mechanisms should seek opportunities for greater engagement with such institutions. As they could also make a valuable contribution to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, consideration should be given to enabling

national human rights institutions to participate in the work of the Commission in their own right.

7. While national mechanisms continue to support the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy, the strategy itself remains inadequately understood and its transformative quality thus not fully realized. Greater efforts are therefore necessary for its institutionalization in all policies and programmes, and at all levels. National mechanisms should play a much stronger role as policy analysts and source of knowledge and expertise for different parts of Government, rather than as service providers. They should assess the gender equality implications of national policies and strategies, including poverty reduction strategies and new aid modalities, and provide policy guidance and advice to different ministries and governmental bodies. The location of the national machinery within Government, and of gender focal points in line ministries, should be such that they can participate in decision-making and help to shape all policies. Advisory committees to Government on gender mainstreaming can play an important role. Academic research can effectively support policy development and the availability of practical tools, benchmarks and gender-sensitive indicators to measure progress in gender mainstreaming.

8. National mechanisms are also increasingly advocating for, and supporting the use of gender-responsive budgeting as an important gender mainstreaming tool. Experience indicates that national mechanisms for gender equality should be involved in planning and budgeting processes, but that the ministry of finance needs to take the lead role to ensure the effective use of gender-responsive budgeting across Government, for example through the issuance of relevant budget decrees. Priority should therefore be given to building capacity and technical expertise of ministry staff. Pilot projects in a number of countries, where gender-responsive budgeting is initially being applied by some ministries only, are providing important insights and contribute to improved use of the tool. There is also some experience in allocating a certain percentage of the national budget for the promotion of gender equality, although such efforts have not been evaluated for impact and effectiveness. Non-governmental organizations sometimes play an important role in advocating for the use and effective application of gender-responsive budgeting. Gender-responsive budgeting is also an important accountability tool for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, disbursement of funds could be delayed or reduced in the absence of gender impact statements.

9. Cooperation and coordination between national mechanisms and multiple stakeholders, including civil society actors, non-governmental organizations and women's and human rights groups, as well as the private sector, is important for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, in particular in the light of the growing diversity of relevant mechanisms. While some formal institutional arrangements are in place, many of these efforts occur in an informal or ad hoc manner. Greater efforts are needed to strengthen capacity for coordination at the national level, to engage more systematically with new actors, such as the private sector, and to enhance links with the women's movement, especially young women and the next generation of leaders. Enhanced interaction with development partners, regional and international networks and academia in support of gender equality is required. The role of men as champions of gender equality should also be further emphasized.

10. The availability of research, sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators can greatly enhance targeted policy development and implementation, as well as effective monitoring and evaluation. While some progress has been made, more efforts are needed, especially in terms of evaluating the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy. National machineries should encourage collection of such data and information, and should work more closely with national statistical offices in the development of methodologies and to expand their role in ensuring the availability of data disaggregated by sex and other variables. The recent establishment of gender equality observatories in a number of countries, and at the regional level, is contributing to greater transparency and better dissemination of gender-specific information. These efforts should be continued and expanded.

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