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Commission on the Status of Women

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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 outcome of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Regional perspectives in progress achieved and remaining gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Moderator’s summary

1. At its 10th meeting, on 4 March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive panel discussion on “Regional perspectives in progress achieved and remaining gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action”. Julio Peralta, Vice-Chair of the Commission, moderated the session. The panellists were: Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); Bader Omar AlDafa, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); Ján Kubiš, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); Lalla Ben Barka, Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); and Sonia Montañó, Director, Division for Gender Affairs, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). An issues paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women provided the framework for the discussion, which focused on the main findings resulting from the regional reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of regional intergovernmental meetings and the next steps to be taken.

2. The five regions have undertaken regional review processes under the auspices of the regional commissions of the United Nations. Four regional review meetings



were held in October and November 2009, with the fifth scheduled to be held in Brazil in July 2010, covering the Latin American and Caribbean region. The ECA and ESCAP regional intergovernmental reviews resulted in declarations, namely, the Banjul Declaration and the Bangkok Declaration, respectively. The ESCWA Committee on Women adopted a resolution on the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Arab region. The ECE review resulted in Chair's conclusions.

3. Across all regions, progress has been made in improving the lives of women and girls since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995. This includes the enactment or strengthening of legislative and policy frameworks, and almost all countries are now party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. There have been advances in women's and girls' access to education, with many countries across all regions achieving gender parity at various levels of education. In some countries and subregions, girls' enrolment rates now exceed those of boys. Some of these advances were due to universal and free public education, as well as improved educational curriculums. Violence against women is increasingly being criminalized, there is a growing emphasis on tackling the trafficking in women, and assistance to victims of violence is now more broadly available. There has been some progress in increasing the rates of women's participation in decision-making, although such rates remain very low in some countries and regions. On the other hand, one area in which little progress has been made in developing countries is reducing maternal mortality and improving women's reproductive health.

4. The regional review processes and their outcomes highlighted a number of region-specific priorities and focus areas. ECA, for example, identified seven areas that will receive specific attention in the future, including women's economic empowerment, peace, security and development, violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, climate change and food security, and financing for gender equality. In particular, the ECE region addressed women's economic empowerment, with a focus on gender-sensitive economic policies in the context of the economic and financial crisis, and the role of the corporate sector in promoting gender equality. While the ESCAP region has achieved significant progress in poverty reduction, with more than 350 million people lifted out of extreme poverty, women's poverty rates remain higher than men's. The small island developing States of the region are characterized by particular vulnerabilities and limited structural capacities for rapid progress towards gender equality. Gender perspectives need to be addressed in the responses to the economic, financial and climate change challenges. The ESCWA region called for strengthening the capacity of national mechanisms, for increasing the financial and human resources allocated to policies and programmes aimed at ensuring gender equality, and for the integration of women into conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. In the ECLAC region, such issues as women's participation in the labour market are receiving increased attention, as are issues pertaining to social safety nets and social protection systems.

5. National mechanisms for gender equality continue to play a critical role in the promotion of such equality and the empowerment of women at the national and regional levels, in ensuring good public policies, in building alliances with the women's movement and in promoting action to close implementation gaps. Strong national mechanisms, together with strong social movements, are important

elements for progress in gender equality. At the same time, the review processes in several regions indicated continued gaps in political and institutional support. Adequate sex-disaggregated data and indicators to permit effective and better-targeted policymaking remain scarce, together with monitoring and accountability, although some good examples of progress exist. While the potential of gender-responsive budgeting as an important tool for gender mainstreaming is increasingly recognized, it is not yet sufficiently or adequately applied.

6. Greater efforts are needed in all regions to accelerate progress in women's participation in leadership. While in some countries women now hold more than 30 per cent of the seats in national parliaments, and there are important examples of women holding key positions in the executive and the judiciary, significant disparities persist across and within regions. Low representation of women in decision-making positions in local government, as well as in the private sector, also remains a concern. The use of quotas, benchmarks and timelines has resulted in improvements, and those tools should be used more widely.

7. In all regions, women's participation in the economy is another area in which further progress is required. While women in a very few countries now constitute 50 per cent of the paid labour force, women continue to predominate in informal, unpaid and domestic work characterized by poor and precarious working conditions and a lack of benefits and social security. Gender wage gaps persist in various economic sectors and across education levels. As a result, steps are necessary to enhance social protection and to reconcile work and family responsibilities. The threats posed by the economic and financial crisis and the challenges of climate change and natural disasters should be used as opportunities to revisit economic and social policy frameworks and reorient them towards greater gender sensitivity, and to invest in social areas with a focus on women. Increased investment in agriculture and food security, the expansion of women's access to credit and support for women's entrepreneurship should be accorded greater priority.

8. Given the similarities and differences among regions with regard to progress and persistent challenges, greater attention should be given to both common and region-specific underlying factors. In particular, there is a need to examine and address gender stereotypes, as well as practices and traditions that impede progress in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Strategies should be developed, and good practices and lessons learned should be applied across regions to promote social norms and behaviour patterns that are supportive of gender equality goals.

9. The role of education as a driving force for change in all regions is highlighted. Furthermore, there is a need to better and more consistently engage men in efforts to achieve gender equality. The role of non-governmental and civil society organizations, in particular women's groups, is seen as indispensable in the promotion of gender equality. In all regions, strong partnerships between such groups and national mechanisms for gender equality have been pivotal in bringing about legal and policy changes, as well as concrete and practical improvements in women's lives. More should be done to enhance the role of the media.

10. A number of emerging issues will have an impact on the progress made towards gender equality and empowerment of women, and will require increased attention at the regional level. One such issue is the question of migration and the increased movement of people within and across national borders and regions, in

particular in the ECLAC region. The situation of migrant women in the economy, as well as their roles and rights within family contexts and in decision-making, will increasingly require responses at the policy level.

11. Demographic changes, in particular population ageing in the ECE region, will also require growing attention from a gender perspective, including with regard to women's participation in the labour force and men's sharing of family responsibilities. Greater attention should be given to the role of the corporate and private sectors in the promotion of gender equality.

12. The United Nations, in particular the new composite gender equality entity and the regional commissions, has a critical role to play in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Organization should enhance its leadership role, consistently apply gender equality perspectives in all aspects of its work, and enhance the availability of tools and methodologies for gender mainstreaming. Member States are called upon to reach an early decision on its establishment and to ensure adequate funding for its work.
