



Commission on the Status of Women

Forty-ninth session

28 February – 11 March 2005

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the 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 the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Discussion guide on the Commission on the Status of Women High-level round table

Note by the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women*

I. Organizational aspects and format

A. Background

1. Following the decision of the Commission, at its forty-sixth session in 2002 (decision 46/101), to introduce high-level round tables, starting from its forty-seventh session in 2003, the Commission continues to organize these events. The Commission authorized its Bureau to decide, after consultation with all interested Member States through regional groups, on the number, timing and theme of any such round tables. The Commission held two high-level round tables, one during the forty-seventh session of the Commission on 4 March 2003, and the other during the forty-eighth session of the Commission on 1 March 2004

* The submission of the present document was delayed awaiting the outcome of informal consultations of the Commission.

2. In consultation with regional groups and through informal meetings of the Commission on 23 June 2004, 20 July 2004, and 14 September 2004, the Bureau of the Commission developed a programme of work for the forty-ninth session which includes a high-level round table on Innovations in institutional arrangements for promoting gender equality at national level. The present discussion guide has been prepared by the Bureau to set the framework for the high-level round table.

3. The Division for the Advancement of Women organized an Expert Group Meeting on “The role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: achievements, gaps and challenges” in Rome, Italy from 29 November - 2 December 2004. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to identify the different types of formal mechanisms established at national level and the specific roles played in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, and in particular facilitating gender mainstreaming in all national policy areas.

B. Purpose of the high-level round table

4. The purpose of the high-level round tables, as set out in decision 46/101, is to “further develop opportunities for sharing national experiences during the annual session of the Commission, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and to enhance its working methods.” The round tables enhance the emphasis in the Commission on practical implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document adopted by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

5. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/270B, the high-level round tables will support the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt, the identification of obstacles and constraints encountered in the context of the implementation, as well as the recognition of new challenges and emerging issues.

C. Theme

6. The theme for the high-level event during the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is “Innovations in institutional arrangements for promoting gender equality at national level”. Over the past decade national machineries have increasingly focused on promotion of gender mainstreaming for achieving the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. In addition, new mechanisms, such as gender equality commission, gender focal points, parliamentary caucuses and

ombudspersons for gender equality, have been established at the national level. It is important for the Commission to discuss the achievements and challenges of these new mechanisms and their interrelationship with existing national machinery, such as Ministries of Women's Affairs, and to identify actions to enhance national mechanisms.

D. Participants

7. The high-level round table will provide an opportunity for a dialogue between high-level representatives, including Ministers of Women's Affairs and heads of other national machineries, as well as high-level representatives of women's/gender equality Commissions and other mechanisms for the advancement of women who are attending the forty-ninth session of the Commission. The high-level round table will be open to other Commission members and observers. A number of senior officials from entities of the United Nations system and representatives from non-governmental organizations will also be invited to participate in the dialogue.

E. Format

8. To allow for interaction between participants at the round table two parallel sessions on the same theme will be held simultaneously. The format of the high-level round table should be a free-flowing exchange of experiences, lessons learned, good practices and gaps and challenges at national level. The discussion will be guided in a pro-active manner to ensure adherence to the inter-active format. Participants are to be invited to make short comments, raise questions, or respond to previous speakers, rather than present prepared statements. Interventions should not exceed 3 minutes. Keeping the inputs short will allow all participants to take the floor.

9. After a brief introduction on the discussion during the Expert Group Meeting by the Co-chairs of the Expert Group Meeting, the first half of the high-level round table will focus on dialogue between high-level representatives from capitals. In the second half of the round table, senior officials of United Nations entities and representatives from non-governmental organizations from all regions will be invited to participate in the dialogue.

F. Timing

10. The high-level round table will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 28 February 2005, from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., as part of the forty-ninth session of the Commission.

G. Outcome

11. A Chairperson's summary of the high-level round table will be prepared for inclusion in the report of the Commission on its forty-ninth session.

II. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

12. The proposed theme for the high-level round table is in compliance with the mandates of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as with the General Assembly resolution A/Res/57/270B on "Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields". It also complies with ECOSOC resolution 2001/4 on the multi-year programme of work, which requested the Commission to take into account institutional capacity building.

13. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women is one of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. The Platform proposed strategic objectives with concrete actions to create and strengthen national machineries. According to the Beijing Platform of Action, a national machinery is a central policy-coordinating unit charged with policy advocacy functions, promotion of gender mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation of the progress. The Platform for Action proposed that Governments should, *inter alia*, "encourage and promote the active involvement of the broad and diverse range of institutional actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors to work for equality between women and men" and "report, on a regular basis, to legislative bodies on the progress of efforts, as appropriate, to mainstream gender concerns..." (para, 201, 203 e, f)

14. Chapter 5 of the Beijing Platform for Action "Institutional arrangements" emphasized the importance of national mechanisms in particular for the implementation of the Platform for Action itself (para 296), and reaffirmed that the Commission on the Status of Women should have a central role in monitoring implementation (para 318).

15. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" also addressed the issue of institutional development by pointing out that in many countries, "national machineries have been instituted or strengthened and recognized as the institutional base acting as 'catalysts' for promoting gender equality, gender

mainstreaming and monitoring of the implementation of the Platform for Action...” (para 24). In spite of the fact that “progress has been achieved in terms of the visibility, status, outreach and coordination of activities of these machineries” (para 24), obstacles to the effectiveness of the national machineries were also revealed in many countries. These included inadequate financial and human resources, lack of political will and commitment at the highest level, insufficient understanding of gender equality and mainstreaming among government structures, unclear mandates, and structural and communication problems within and among government agencies (para 25).

B. Discussion guide

16. During the high-level round table interventions should focus on innovations in institutional arrangements. These could include:

(a) Changes in the status and situation of national machineries, including changes in the political environment which have supported or constrained the role of national machineries;

(b) Policy environment and political factors underpinning the establishment of new mechanisms. Different types of national mechanisms and their respective roles and functions in formulation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, and in particular facilitating gender mainstreaming in all national policy areas;

(c) Types of inter-relationships between the different national mechanisms, good practices in terms of synergies and collaboration as well as the constraints experienced over the past decade;

(d) The achievements, gaps and challenges of each of the types of mechanisms, as well as strategies for building on the achievements and addressing the gaps and challenges, and the potential for enhancing the roles of each mechanism in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women strategies in the coming decade;

(e) Future priorities and strategies for different types of national mechanisms to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

17. Guiding questions on institutional developments included in the questionnaire submitted to Member States for the preparation of the review and appraisal mandated in the multi-year programme of work in the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 could also provide guidance for the discussion in the high-level round table.

(a) What national mechanisms exist for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women – for example, ministry, national commission, parliamentary committee or commission? What mandates and resources does each body have and how do they work together? Describe the location of the national mechanisms and the access to decision-making processes. What are the main partners of the national mechanisms? What networks have been established and how effective are these networks? What resources do the national mechanisms have in terms of staff and financial support? What percentage of financial resources comes from international or bilateral donors?

(b) Have focal points for gender equality and empowerment of women been established within line ministries, and in which ministries? What support is provided from within the ministries? What support (training, advice etc.) is provided by the national machinery? How effective are these focal points?

(c) What are the roles of the different stakeholders? For example what role does Parliament play in the promotion and monitoring of gender equality and women's empowerment? How could this role be strengthened? Describe the role of NGOs in planning and implementing the follow-up activities. Do NGOs participate formally in the mechanisms established to follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women?