

**Commission on the Status of Women**  
**Forty-ninth session**  
**28 February to 11 March 2005**

**Panel III: “Presentation of the review and appraisal processes at regional level -- achievements, gaps and challenges”**

Summary submitted by the Moderator (Ms. Marine Davtyan)

1. At its 10th meeting, on 4 March 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion followed by a dialogue on “Presentation of the review and appraisal processes at regional level -- achievements, gaps and challenges”. The panellists were: Josephine Ouedraogo, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission of Africa (ECA); Patrice Robineau, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); Alicia Barcena-Ibarra, Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Thelma Kay, Chief, Emerging Social Issues Division, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); and Fatima Sbaity-Kassem, Director, Centre for Women, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). An issues paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women provided the framework for the discussion.

2. The panelists summarized the regional review processes and high-level regional meetings which had been supported by the regional commissions. They provided inputs to the 10-year global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly<sup>1</sup>. These reviews had provided detailed insights into the situation of women, evaluated progress and identified challenges and areas requiring intensified efforts. They had highlighted region-specific issues, thus responding to the respective regional context. ECA’s primary focus had been on combating poverty. In the ECE region, particular attention had been paid to women in the economy, institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality, and trafficking in women. ESCAP’s review process had covered all critical areas of concern. ECLAC’s main focus had been on women’s poverty, economic autonomy and gender equality, and empowerment, political participation and institution-building. ESCWA had paid special attention to peace, and also addressed issues such as women’s illiteracy and poverty. The meetings had resulted in a reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action and of the respective regional Platforms, and had stressed commitment to their full implementation. Implementation of the Beijing and regional Platforms also contributed to the implementation of other United Nations conferences and events, and towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. Panelists suggested that the process of implementing the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action at regional level had been characterized by strengthened cooperation between governments and civil society. Networks and partnerships had been established or strengthened among different stakeholders, and alliances among different groups of women had

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<sup>1</sup> E/CN.6/2005/CRP.7 and Add. 1 to 5.

been reinforced. The regional commissions had played a catalytic role in bringing together different actors, including entities of the United Nations system.

4. While in general there had been progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, results varied from region to region and among countries, and in regard to various critical areas of concern. Panelists, for example, noted that in the area of participation in decision-making, women in Rwanda held a record 48.5 per cent of the seats in Parliament. In the ESCAP region, more than 20 per cent of parliamentarians were women. Women had also made significant gains in the ESCWA region, albeit from a very low base. The increasing number of women in local government especially through quotas and other affirmative action measures was an encouraging development.

5. National machineries and other institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women had been established or strengthened in all regions, although not uniformly or systematically. The important role of Parliament had been emphasized. The past decade had also witnessed women's successful and increased use of information and communications technologies and new media for policy advocacy and increased networking within countries and across borders.

6. In all regions, adherence to international human rights instruments of particular relevance to women had increased, and more attention was being paid to women's enjoyment of human rights. Laws had been adopted to eliminate discrimination against women and support women's equality in many areas, although conflicts persisted between customary, statutory and religious laws. Efforts to tackle violence against women had become more systematic.

7. Several panelists highlighted progress in girls' and women's education, noting that girls' enrolment rates were now equal to, and in some cases exceeded those of boys. Some regions where girls had lagged behind were well on the way to achieving the goal of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Panelists noted that particular attention had been given to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other health issues as they related to women, through awareness-raising, and in prevention and treatment. In some regions, visible progress had been made in improving female life expectancy and reducing maternal mortality rates, and more attention was being paid to women's sexual and reproductive rights. More women were now in formal employment, the number of female entrepreneurs was growing, and micro-credit schemes had been set up.

8. Panelists emphasized that many challenges remained to be met. Women had suffered from the impact of globalization and the lack of attention to gender perspectives in trade, growth and employment policies. Limited attention to gender issues in fiscal and budgetary policies, and in reforms of social expenditures and benefits had had disproportionately negative impacts on women. The reviews had also found deteriorating social security, health and work conditions for women, gender pay gaps, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and especially of HIV/AIDS. These processes had highlighted the need to integrate gender perspectives into all policies and programmes in all sectors, and drawn attention to the negative impact on women of gender-blind policies.

9. Some regions or sub-regions, such as Africa, Western Asia and countries in transition in the ECE region, had experienced increasing rates of female poverty. The needs of women in least developed countries remained unmet, and certain vulnerable groups of women, especially single heads of households, older women, adolescents and young women, migrant women, rural women, and indigenous women also required further targeted attention. Trafficking in women

was a particular challenge in the ECE region. In the ESCAP region, the growing informalization and casualization of the labour market had led to irregularity and lack of income security for women. Political instability due to armed conflict and economic constraints had impacted negatively on the welfare of women in the ESCWA region. Although women in the ECLAC region contributed significantly to development, some 44 per cent remained poor.

10. Institutional mechanisms remained weak in many countries, as reflected in their limited human and financial resources, insufficient commitment and political will; isolation from line ministries; and lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

11. Panelists highlighted suggestions for future actions that had emanated from the regional meetings. Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action required expanded use of the gender mainstreaming strategy and close linkages between economic and social policies and programmes, gender-sensitive fiscal and budgetary policies, gender impact assessments of trade policies and social sector reforms. Particular challenges had to be addressed through specific action plans with clearly identified actors and measures. Panelists highlighted the critical role of non-governmental organizations, and called for more effective coordination among all actors at the local, national and regional levels, including with and among public agencies, civil society and the regional commissions in order to learn from and share experiences, exchange good practices and work on transboundary issues. Action was suggested to further disseminate the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; increase resource allocation for gender equality programmes; develop regional networks of men and women economists to work on gender-sensitive economic policy; enhance collection and use of data disaggregated by sex; and improve tools to facilitate the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy. An enhanced focus on institutional development, the rule of law and implementation of the Convention and ratification of the Optional Protocol was needed, as well as on awareness-raising to tackle stereotypes and discriminatory practices, and cultural changes.

12. Panelists noted that the role and mandates of the regional commissions in regard to gender equality had been expanded after the Beijing Conference to take account of the new strategic orientations, and gender equality units in the commissions had both normative and operational functions. ECA had developed a gender-development index that would serve as a single framework for evaluating progress in implementation. ESCAP had provided normative and technical assistance to the region's policy makers, especially those in the national machineries for the advancement of women. The commissions continued to implement capacity-building and training workshops to strengthen institutional capacity to mainstream gender perspectives in all aspects of their work.