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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 sharing a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

## **Linkages between implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals**

### **Moderator’s summary**

1. On 4 March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel on the theme “Linkages between implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals”. The session was moderated by Mr. Takashi Ashiki, Vice Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women. The panellists were: Ms. Eva Rathgeber, University of Ottawa/Carleton University; Ms. Gülden Türköz-Cosslett, UNDP Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Resident Coordinator, Albania; and Ms. Zo Randriamaro, Training Coordinator, Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era. An issues paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women provided the framework for the discussion.

2. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provide the global agenda for women’s human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. In recent years, the understanding of the value of investing in gender equality and women’s empowerment to achieve internationally agreed development goals has clearly emerged. It has also been confirmed that the Platform for Action provides



comprehensive guidance for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in a gender-responsive manner. However, gender equality perspectives are not well reflected in the current formulation of many of the Millennium Development Goals and their targets and indicators, and are often not explicitly integrated in strategies and plans to achieve the Goals. There is insufficient coherence between efforts to implement the Platform for Action and the strategies and actions to achieve the Goals, and this lack of coherence is a contributing factor in the uneven and slow performance towards realizing many of the Goals. There is therefore a need for increased attention to be paid to lessons learned and to promising practices in implementing the Platform for Action in different country contexts. Five years before the target date for achieving the Goals, lessons learned from the implementation of the Platform for Action could help to address gaps, adjust policy and identify concrete actions for accelerating progress.

3. Accountability for gender equality and the empowerment of women requires strengthening. In this regard, international human rights standards and instruments and related monitoring and review processes are especially pertinent, and greater efforts are necessary to overcome gaps and challenges in complying with obligations for equality and non-discrimination at the national level. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been, and remains, central to the practical realization of the gender equality agenda and the rights of women. Other international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Labour Organization conventions likewise provide guidance in ensuring economic and social rights for women and should serve as the basis for formulating relevant policies and strategies.

4. A key lesson that has emerged from the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is the role of an enabling environment in the promotion of gender equality. This should in particular include gender-sensitive policies and laws, strong national mechanisms for gender equality and dedicated resources. The importance of such an environment has been demonstrated by the growing number of countries that has implemented stronger policy frameworks, national action plans, and better legislation to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Positive results have been achieved through changes in laws and customs that are discriminatory to women; quotas and targets for, and introduction of other temporary special measures for women's participation in decision-making; and the development of comprehensive strategies and awareness-raising campaigns to address violence against women. Strong and sustained political will has been instrumental in promoting women's participation in decision-making and accelerating girls' access to education, and is essential in closing the gap between gender equality commitments and their effective implementation. The gender mainstreaming strategy remains pivotal for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Gender analysis is a key tool for developing better policies and programmatic responses to global and local development challenges.

5. United Nations support at the national level, in terms of lessons learned and good practices, could provide insights for enhancing implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action as a means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The example of Albania, which is one of eight pilot countries included in the United Nations "Delivering as one" programme, demonstrates how inclusive processes

have significantly strengthened Government and civil society ownership for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and how concrete results for women have been achieved. These have included the first-ever national strategy on gender equality and eradication of domestic violence (2007-2010), the introduction of a quota in the Electoral Code and a 50 per cent increase in financial resources allocated to combat violence against women.

6. While important advances for women have been achieved globally, the recent economic and financial crisis and the challenge of climate change have had an adverse impact on progress and have also led to significant setbacks in achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals, including those related to poverty and hunger, and health and decent work. These experiences should lead to a reorientation towards more people-centred policy frameworks that would strengthen the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Since the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a shared responsibility, greater efforts are needed to support developing countries towards achieving the internationally agreed gender equality goals and commitments, including through financial and technical assistance.

7. Although many development and poverty reduction strategies continue to respond inadequately to the needs and concerns of women and girls, increasing efforts are being made to put in place gender-responsive national development policies. Development cooperation efforts should also increasingly integrate gender equality perspectives. A range of critical interventions and actions is available and should be taken to address poverty among women and to support their economic empowerment, including: making full employment and the generation of decent work the primary goal of macroeconomic policies; ensuring women's control over and equal access to economic and financial resources; ensuring universal access to affordable food; and addressing past policy neglect in relation to the agricultural sector, particularly subsistence farming where women farmers are concentrated. Actions should also be taken to ensure the development and financing of universal and gender-sensitive social protection and insurance systems, and facilitate the reconciliation of paid and unpaid work, including through improved public provisioning of adequate support mechanisms and services. The specific needs and priorities of women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization require enhanced attention.

8. The very limited progress made in improving maternal health, in particular maternal mortality, is an issue of great concern. Almost all maternal deaths can be prevented through effective interventions and increased investment. A number of reliable strategies and actions have been identified that give greater priority to, and achieve the desired results in, reducing maternal mortality and improving maternal health, including: increased access to health services, skilled health professionals and birth attendants, the promotion of hospital delivery, and better transport to and from hospitals. In the light of the increase in adolescent pregnancies, the unmet health needs of young women require increased attention, including access to quality sexual and health services, counselling, and to sexual education for both young women and men.

9. Participatory processes involving a range of stakeholders can result in better policies, planning and budgets for gender equality and women's empowerment, and

in increased ownership and outcomes at the national level. Collaboration, partnerships and cooperation among all stakeholders, including civil society and women's organizations, should therefore be enhanced. Since women at the grass-roots level often do not benefit from large-scale development initiatives, it is necessary to identify and put in place mechanisms to ensure that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes and in programme development. Social dialogue is another key aspect for promoting equal opportunities for women and men.

10. The availability of credible and reliable data and the development of gender-sensitive indicators, as well as tools such as scorecards, peer reviews and gender auditing, can also contribute to strengthening accountability for implementation, including through better monitoring and evaluation of actions taken. Efforts to strengthen national capacity to collect and analyse sex- and age-disaggregated data and to develop gender-sensitive indicators should be enhanced. National censuses provide an opportunity to expand the availability of such data, and various surveys, such as health, domestic violence and time-use surveys, also contribute towards increasing the availability of data for enhanced policy development. Gender-responsive budgeting is increasingly recognized as an important tool for gender mainstreaming and for ensuring the mobilization and expenditure of public resources for the promotion of gender equality, and for enhancing overall transparency and accountability.

11. Civil society organizations and the media continue to play an important role in holding Governments accountable to commitments made on gender equality and the empowerment of women. They play a key role in keeping the population informed about the level of progress — or lack thereof — made by their Governments in the implementation of gender equality commitments.

12. The new composite gender equality entity of the United Nations has a critical role to play in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, including to promote greater coherence and to significantly enhance the Organization's ability to support Member States in achieving gender equality commitments. The composite entity should be equipped with adequate human and financial resources in order to effectively carry out its mandate.

13. The high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to review progress in the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals, scheduled to be held in September 2010, presents an important opportunity to renew existing commitments to gender equality, galvanize coordinated action among all stakeholders and elicit the necessary resources to ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Gender equality and the empowerment of women should not be confined to Goal 3 only, but be considered for all the Millennium Development Goals, in terms of both analysis and outcomes. In the context of the Millennium Development Goal reviews under way at the national level, opportunities should be sought for including sex-disaggregated data and analysis and for mainstreaming gender equality perspectives in national Millennium Development Goal reports. Introducing specific national targets and indicators for gender equality and the empowerment of women is another means of giving greater visibility to the gender dimensions of all the Goals.