

Distr.: Limited  
10 March 2010

Original: English

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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**

### **High-level round table on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

#### **Chair’s summary**

1. At its 4th meeting, on 1 March 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. The interactive high-level round table focused on the sharing of national experiences, lessons learned and good practices. A discussion guide (E/CN.6/2010/3) provided the framework for the interactive dialogue.

2. The high-level round table was organized in two parallel sessions in order to allow for interaction among the large number of participants. The sessions were chaired, respectively, by Mr. Garen Nazarian, Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, and Mr. Cesare Maria Ragaglini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations. Two keynote speakers opened the discussion, Ms. Caren Grown, Economist-in-Residence, American University, Washington, D.C., and Ms. Lydia



Alpízar Durán, Executive Director, Association for Women's Rights in Development. Representatives of Member States exchanged information on the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action in their countries and made proposals for future action. Invited representatives of United Nations entities (United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and non-governmental organizations (Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange and International Indigenous Women's Forum) responded and contributed to the interactive dialogue.

3. The full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality and empowerment of women is a key development goal in its own right and an important means to achieving all the Millennium Development Goals. While Goal 3 and Goal 5 are gender-specific, there are clear gender equality dimensions in all the Goals. Progress has been made, but it has been slow and uneven. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to the full implementation of the Platform for Action and achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals. Attention was drawn to the need to further strengthen linkages between implementation of the Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. Gender perspectives need to be more clearly articulated and addressed in strategies to achieve all the Goals at national and local levels. There is a need to develop better mechanisms and tools for ensuring accountability of States and other stakeholders for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in all sectors.

4. The annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to review progress in the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010 provide an important opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of women for the achievement of all the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

5. Education plays a critical role in the empowerment of women and girls. Good practices, such as abolishing school fees, have resulted in steady advances towards meeting international targets in improving girls' access to education, particularly at the primary level. However, progress remains uneven between and within regions and countries. Secondary and university education remains crucial for expanding opportunities for women and girls. Non-formal education, including vocational programmes, is an important complement to formal education. Participants emphasized the need to ensure that educational gains of women and girls translate into better employment opportunities.

6. The right to bodily integrity, including sexual and reproductive health, is fundamental to gender equality and women's human rights. Women continue to face preventable health challenges. Even though the maternal mortality rate in some countries has decreased, there is limited progress on reproductive health. Millennium Development Goal 5 to improve maternal health continues to fall behind and urgently requires increased investment. Every day, at least 1,500 women and adolescent girls die of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Almost all maternal deaths could be prevented through interventions such as safe motherhood programmes, free maternal health care, recruitment of competent birth attendants and emergency obstetric care. Women must be able to determine for themselves the spacing and the number of their children. Well-functioning health

systems are critical for addressing the specific health needs of women and girls. During the last decade, funding for women's health remained stagnant. It is estimated that US\$ 24 billion per year is needed to significantly decrease maternal deaths, an amount that is equivalent to six days of global military spending.

7. Pregnancy rates remain high for adolescent girls owing to teenage pregnancies, as well as the practice of early and child marriages in some countries. National laws are needed to prevent child marriage, together with other measures, including marriage registration systems, incentive schemes to keep girls in school and programmes to mobilize communities.

8. Within the context of Millennium Development Goal 6, the feminization of HIV and AIDS continues to be a cause of great concern. Young women are more susceptible to HIV infection and in many countries they have a higher HIV prevalence rate than men. Measures are needed to ensure women's access to prevention, treatment and care. Other key interventions include sex education for girls and boys and behaviour change programmes.

9. Violence against women is an obstacle to the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and carries great economic costs and personal suffering. International and national initiatives to address violence against women have increased, as many countries have strengthened laws, policies and institutions to end violence against women. Participants commended the Secretary-General's Campaign "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" in increasing momentum for efforts to address violence against women. Action is needed to ensure that interventions to prevent and eliminate violence against women are comprehensive, fully implemented and monitored, and sustainable across all sectors, including health, education and employment.

10. Women's economic empowerment is central to the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality perspectives have, however, been largely ignored in the formulation of macroeconomic policies, which have differential impacts on women and men. A shift in the current macroeconomic policy framework and economic structures is needed to ensure women's equal access to and control over economic resources. Systematic attention should be paid to the priorities and needs of women and girls in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of economic policies.

11. Legislation and policies have been adopted to increase women's ownership of productive assets. Implementation, however, remains inadequate in many countries owing to socio-cultural norms and women's lack of knowledge of their rights. While microcredit remains an important poverty reduction strategy, it has not been a sufficient tool for women's economic empowerment.

12. While financial and economic crises have gender-specific impacts and place a disproportionate burden on women, in particular poor women, they also present opportunities to change strategies and actions. Responses to the financial and economic crisis, including stimulus packages, need to take into account the needs and priorities of women and girls to ensure that the gains made in promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women are not reversed.

13. Women's access to the labour market and decent work is critical. Many countries have taken legislative and policy measures to address discrimination

against women in the labour market. In recent years, women's access to employment opportunities has increased. However, women continue to be concentrated in vulnerable and low-paid jobs with little security. Occupational segregation and gender wage-gaps persist in all parts of the world. Unequal sharing of unpaid work, including caregiving, between women and men constrains women's ability to fully participate in the labour market.

14. Promising practices to increase women's participation in the labour market and support the redistribution of unpaid work between women and men include parental leave policies for both women and men. Investment in infrastructure, such as energy, water and sanitation, childcare facilities and transportation systems, can reduce women's time burdens leading to increased opportunity to participate in the labour market. It is also important to ensure that women have access to newly created jobs, such as green jobs.

15. In many countries, social protection measures such as unemployment insurance schemes, universal health coverage and social pensions have played critical roles in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as realizing poverty reduction, economic growth and development. Good and promising practices also include extension of social security coverage to groups that have traditionally been excluded or marginalized, including domestic workers. Basic social security for all would contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as would the establishment of a global social protection floor.

16. Wars, natural disasters and related crisis situations have profoundly different impacts on women and girls. All forms of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence, may be exacerbated and access to health care, education and livelihood severely affected. Effective responses require that such differences be taken into account in needs assessments and planning in the aftermath of an armed conflict or crisis. They also require the equal participation and inclusion of women in decision-making. Participants noted the inadequate recognition of, and financing for, women's needs in post-conflict and crisis situations.

17. The tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security on 31 October 2010 provides an important opportunity to examine ways to further enhance implementation of, and accountability for, global commitments linked to women, peace and security.

18. Patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society continue to reinforce inequality. Discriminatory customs and traditions undermine progress in many areas, including women's access to resources. Participants noted the importance of innovative ways to engage community leaders in efforts to eliminate practices and customs that discriminate against women. In the design, planning and monitoring of laws, policies and programmes to achieve gender equality, it is important to fully address the multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization that particular groups of women continue to face, including rural, indigenous and older women, women belonging to ethnic minorities and women with disabilities.

19. Progress still cannot be sufficiently measured in several of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals because of limited or non-existent data. Participants recognized that despite efforts to improve collection of data disaggregated by sex and age and development of

gender-sensitive indicators, many gaps remain. Attention was drawn to the need for increased investment in data collection and analysis.

20. While participants recognized that gender equality makes good economic sense, inadequate resources have been allocated to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. Gender-responsive budgets are an important tool for ensuring the mobilization and expenditure of public resources, and for holding Governments accountable for their policy commitments on gender equality. Tax revenues can be redirected towards social programmes, such as health and education, that lead to positive gender equality outcomes and stimulate economic growth and development. Predictable and sustainable donor support remains a necessary component for the effective implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

21. Consultative processes, solid partnerships and collaboration among different stakeholders, including line ministries, parliamentarians, the judiciary, civil society, the private sector and the media, are critical to achieve gender equality. Participants highlighted good practices involving collaboration between national machineries for gender equality, line ministries and civil society, resulting in improved implementation and monitoring of gender equality laws and policies.

22. Participants noted the role of the proposed new composite gender equality entity in the effective implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The new entity should champion a stronger role and voice for women in global governance and policymaking. Such an entity should have strong operational capacity at the country level, significant resources, and be headed by a leader with political stature. It should strengthen accountability in the United Nations for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, and significantly enhance the Organization's ability to support countries to implement gender equality commitments.

23. Participants recommended a range of actions to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including the following:

- Prioritize gender equality and empowerment of women in national policies, strategies, programmes and actions, based on the Platform for Action, for the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals
- Strengthen partnerships among different stakeholders to ensure better links between existing policies, plans and strategies for implementation of the Platform for Action and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals
- Review, amend and abolish all laws, regulations, policies, practices and customs that discriminate against women, in accordance with international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the ILO Conventions
- Strengthen the capacity of national mechanisms for gender equality to effectively participate in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of all policies, programmes and strategies, as well as in data collection and analysis

- Integrate in future national censuses and household surveys questions that would provide for better data disaggregated by sex, age and other variables
- Put in place comprehensive legal and policy frameworks to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women
- Ensure that economic stimulus packages, including public job creation programmes, investments for technological upgrading and green energy, are gender-sensitive and create jobs for women
- Expand social protection measures and eliminate inequalities between women and men in access to coverage and explore opportunities for establishing a global social protection floor
- Carry out gender-sensitive analysis of revenues and expenditures in all policy areas and take into account the review and evaluation results in budget planning, allocation and revenue-raising
- Strengthen the focus and impact of development assistance, specifically targeting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

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