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Agenda item 3 (b)

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”: emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men

High-level round table of the Commission on the Status of Women on incorporating gender perspectives into national development strategies, as requested at the 2005 World Summit, for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals

Summary submitted by the Chairpersons: Carmen María Gallardo (El Salvador) and Szilvia Szabo (Hungary)

1. At its second meeting, on 28 February 2006, the Commission held a high-level round table in two parallel sessions on the theme “Incorporating gender perspectives into national development strategies, as requested at the 2005 World Summit, for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals”. The purpose of the high-level round table, as set out in decision 46/101, was to enhance the emphasis in the Commission on practical implementation through the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, the identification of obstacles and constraints encountered in the context of implementation, and the identification of new challenges and emerging issues. The discussion guide prepared by the Bureau of the Commission (E/CN.6/2006/CRP.2) provided the framework for the interactive dialogue on incorporating gender perspectives into national development strategies.

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 Carmen María Gallardo, Chairperson, and Szilvia Szabo,

Vice-Chairperson of the Commission. The dialogue followed an interactive format in two segments. The first segment was devoted to a dialogue among high-level representatives attending the fiftieth session of the Commission. In the second segment, senior representatives of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations were invited to take part in the discussion.

3. A total of 63 speakers participated in the high-level round table. Participants included 54 Ministers, deputy ministers and high-level officials from capitals, four representatives of United Nations entities and five representatives of non-governmental organizations.

4. Participants called for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and noted the emphasis placed on gender equality at the 2005 World Summit. Gender equality was both a means and an end, and its realization also contributed to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, participants highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for the promotion of gender equality in all sectors and at all levels. Although the Beijing Platform for Action calls for the consistent use of this strategy, participants expressed disappointment that only limited and uneven progress had been achieved so far.

5. Participants underlined the need to integrate gender perspectives into national development policies, strategies and plans. There was concern that, while Governments consistently focused on economic development, in particular macroeconomic issues, the promotion of gender equality was not yet consistently seen as a priority issue. The impact of macroeconomic policies, including trade policies, on the promotion and realization of gender equality also continued to require further attention, as some policies further exacerbated inequality between women and men, including in areas such as employment and social protection. Gender issues persistently remained marginalized and were added onto planning processes rather than being considered from the outset.

6. Examples were provided of the integration of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into national development plans, as well as into poverty reduction strategies designed to address a variety of social and economic issues. At the same time, while gender equality objectives and gender perspectives were increasingly addressed at the policy level, participants noted significant gaps in their implementation at the programme level. Among persistent constraints for the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming were the lack of adequate and effective accountability, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; limited capacity and expertise for gender mainstreaming, especially in line ministries; and insufficient human and financial resources. There was also insufficient coordination among various planning and monitoring bodies. Progress could be achieved with the establishment of gender units, the designation of gender focal points and the use of networks, tools and guidelines. Awareness-raising and training activities were needed for the effective incorporation of gender perspectives into national policies and programmes, and increased resources had to be allocated to these activities.

7. Participants stressed that the design and implementation of national development policies and programmes that successfully integrated gender perspectives required multisectoral approaches, common indicators, accountability mechanisms and partnerships among all stakeholders. Such approaches should

involve sectoral or line ministries, development partners, civil society, including women's networks and grass-roots organizations, and the private sector.

8. Participants underscored the critical role of national machineries for the advancement of women in mainstreaming a gender perspective into national development policies and plans, as well as in budgetary processes, including through effective links with line ministries. Tools such as gender-responsive budgeting processes and gender audits of legislation, policies, strategies and programmes had been developed in a growing number of countries.

9. In order to fulfil their catalytic role in ensuring gender mainstreaming in national development plans, many of the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women had to be strengthened. The impact of the work of these machineries was enhanced by the active involvement or support of the highest levels of Government. Concern was expressed that national machineries were often the first to be subject to budgetary cuts in situations of fiscal constraints. Participants called for adequate financial and human resources to ensure that national machineries could effectively carry out their mandates, including through assistance from the international community.

10. Participants also noted the need for enhanced attention to gender equality issues by the donor community in the development dialogue. In that regard, many participants underlined that enhanced international cooperation that adequately incorporated gender perspectives was needed to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including those on gender equality. Participants discussed ways in which gender perspectives could be more consistently incorporated into new aid modalities, as reflected in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee in March 2005. Efforts were needed to ensure a strong role and voice for women at the national level in partnerships between donor and recipient countries, in order to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in development cooperation. South-South cooperation also needed to be enhanced. At the country level, United Nations gender theme groups had been instrumental in bringing together stakeholders from the United Nations system, government experts and civil society, and in moving forward the gender equality agenda within the operational entities of the United Nations system.

11. Progress in integrating gender perspectives into national development plans was greatly facilitated when women occupied leadership positions in relevant government planning offices. The small number of women in decision-making bodies was one of the challenges that had to be addressed, including through positive actions and temporary special measures, as called for in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

12. Participants discussed areas that required particular attention in national development planning. It was suggested that employment and decent work, as well as social protection, should be core issues in poverty reduction strategies. Specific attention should also be paid to rural women, women's employment conditions and the right to equal pay for equal work and the promotion of women's access to work.

13. Further evidence-based research should be undertaken to demonstrate the positive impact of gender equality on development. Existing data indicated that women's access to agricultural services and tools increased agricultural outputs and

that women's literacy and education had a positive impact on child mortality rates as well as on the educational achievement of children. Education of girls and women was also positively correlated with enhanced gender equality and reduction of poverty. On the other hand, women's educational achievements, especially at higher levels, did not necessarily translate into their increased equality in employment and the labour market. Lack of gender equality has significant costs for society, as does violence against women.

14. The persistence of attitudes and stereotypes that discriminated against women, including concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society, was seen as an obstacle to gender-sensitive national development planning and the achievement of gender equality. There should be more discussion on the role of culture in the promotion of gender equality. Greater efforts were also needed to address the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality and to strengthen partnerships with men.

15. Participants stressed the importance of reliable sex-disaggregated statistics and data, and results-based goals, targets and indicators for monitoring and measuring progress towards the achievement of gender equality and internationally agreed development goals. Such efforts should include data on specific groups of women, such as rural women. Participants called for increased attention to the situation of migrant, trafficked, refugee and displaced women and to the lack of adequate laws to protect these groups of vulnerable women.

16. Participants provided examples of national plans of action for gender equality and their preparation through participatory processes that involved grass-roots organizations. Constitutional and legislative review and reforms had resulted in enhanced gender equality — for example, in relation to access to land, employment and women's protection from violence. Microcredit schemes served to enhance women's economic empowerment.

17. The high-level round table greatly benefited from the participation of high-level representatives from capitals. The exchange of knowledge and experiences among Member States, representatives of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations was seen as a valuable contribution to the further integration of gender perspectives into national development strategies. At the same time, the need to expand discussions on gender equality in forums not primarily devoted to the promotion of gender equality was highlighted in order to ensure coherence between gender-specific and sectoral programmes for the promotion of gender equality.