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Commission on the Status of Women

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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

Key policy initiatives and capacity-building on gender mainstreaming: focus on education and training

Moderator’s summary

1. On 23 February 2011, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel meeting entitled “Key policy initiatives and capacity-building on gender mainstreaming: focus on education and training”. The panel meeting was part of the Commission’s consideration of its priority theme, “Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”.

2. The discussion was moderated by Mr. Tetsuya Kimura, Vice-Chair of the Commission. The panellists were: Ms. Diana Serafini, Vice-Minister for Educational Management, Ministry of Education and Culture, Paraguay; Ms. Subhangi Herath, Senior Lecturer in sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; Ms. Ilze Trapenciene, researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia; and Ms. S. Gülser Corat, Director, Division for Gender Equality, Office of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

3. Participants highlighted a variety of institutional mechanisms, constitutional and legislative provisions, plans, policies and programmes established to address the challenges faced by women and girls within education systems and during their transition to decent work and employment. Countries have in place and are implementing long-term national universal education and literacy plans that include gender equality as a key priority. Inter-ministerial cooperation, accountability

mechanisms and capacity development across ministries have proven particularly effective in incorporating gender perspectives in education systems as well as in addressing gender stereotypes in society. Specific plans and strategies have been developed to address gender gaps in a number of disciplines, including science and technology, math, engineering and architecture. Concerted efforts are still needed to systematically monitor and evaluate progress made by women and girls in education systems. This requires high quality data and statistics on enrolment, attendance and completion rates of women, men, girls and boys, as well as on the quality of education.

4. While many national education plans have strong principles and standards pertaining to gender equality, they often lack the corresponding allocation of financial resources. Gender-responsive budgeting can be an effective tool in helping to ensure that resource allocations promote equal access to education for both girls and boys.

5. While many low-income countries have stepped up their efforts to commit domestic resources to the education sector, those efforts remain insufficient and uneven, and available resources are inadequate. In the context of the financial and economic crisis, some Governments have made budgetary cuts in the education sector. According to the UNESCO 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, an estimated \$16 billion would be needed annually to meet the Education for All goals in low-income countries. By comparison, worldwide military expenditures, which reached \$1.5 trillion in 2009, are 100 times more than the amount needed to close the financing gap to meet the Education for All goals. External assistance, including official development assistance, would be needed to meet these goals. Innovative forms of partnerships, including with the private sector, and innovative funding mechanisms are increasingly evident in the education sector. It is important that these new forms of financing reach the most marginalized, including women and girls living in conflict settings and in rural areas.

6. Formal and non-formal education and training are both important elements of educational systems. High quality vocational education and training that prepares individuals for the world of work and, more generally, for life is not only essential for a knowledge-based society but also imperative for economic development. Women continue to face barriers in accessing vocational training, however, owing, inter alia, to low social acceptance for such training, family responsibilities, lack of self-confidence and long distances to educational institutions. Efforts to increase women's access to and awareness of vocational education and training opportunities have included information campaigns, flexible schedules and gender-sensitive teaching and training methodologies. Further efforts are needed to ensure that vocational education and training programmes contribute to life-long learning and are designed to attract women and men to non-traditional and new sectors of work.

7. The quality of education is key to translating educational gains into employment opportunities. Urgent attention to this issue is needed as many children, in particular girls, leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills or the marketable knowledge and skills needed in today's competitive job market, including information and communications technology (ICT) skills. One dimension of quality education is curriculum content, which provides women and girls with such skills. Guidelines have been developed to assist schools to integrate gender perspectives into their curricula, and priority should also be given to incorporating

skills development training into existing curricula. For example, formal training in skills relevant to today's job market, such as critical thinking, problem-solving and computer literacy, should be part of quality education. Education that helps women and girls make informed choices in life, such as sex education, should also be integrated into curricula.

8. Gender stereotypes in formal curricula and textbooks have contributed to gender-based segregation in the career choices made by students, male and female. Many countries have taken steps to redesign education materials to eliminate sexist images and discriminatory practices. Initiatives that expose girls and boys to a wide range of occupations such as "Bring your daughter/son to work" days, and outreach campaigns to present a diversity of professions have helped combat gender stereotypes. Positive female role models, in particular in rural and remote communities, and scholarships have encouraged girls to enter male-dominated sectors. Even though an increasing number of women have become primary wage earners, further efforts are needed to change the stereotypical perception of men as primary wage earners and women as primary caregivers and secondary earners.

9. Teachers, who bring their own gender biases to the classroom, can perpetuate gender stereotypes. Their attitudes and expectations with regard to girls and boys in the classroom can negatively impact girls' career choices. To address this issue, teacher-training programmes are increasingly promoting the principles of gender equality, helping to surface stereotypes and equipping future female and male teachers with the skills to prevent the perpetuation of such stereotypes.

10. Many participants reported important progress in gender parity in school enrolment at all levels, and in some countries girls now surpass boys in both completion rates and achievement. Nonetheless, women often find it difficult to obtain decent work that guarantees rights to workers, extends social protection and promotes social dialogue, and in some cases highly educated women have had to migrate as unskilled labour in search of employment. Women's transition from education to decent work can be particularly difficult owing to the preference of employers to hire young men rather than young women. A strong legal and policy framework is required to ensure that women are not discriminated against in pay or on the basis of marriage or pregnancy. Some countries have implemented programmes to help women negotiate better employment contracts and higher rates of remuneration.

11. A labour market free of inequalities and discrimination enables women to take up employment on an equal footing with men. In this regard, minimum wage ordinance, equal pay for work of equal value provision, social security provisions, family-friendly policies and practices, the availability of childcare facilities and the elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace have played an important role in increasing women's access to decent work. Increased control over their rates of remuneration can be a further incentive for women seeking work.

12. More attention to young women's transition from education to employment is required in order to ensure that their education matches the demands of the labour market and translates into decent work. Vocational training and skills training in numeracy, literacy and competency-based and "real-life" skills have proven effective in helping women make the transition to the labour market. While women and girls often acquire marketable skills informally through family and community life, these skills are rarely recognized as qualifications for work: efforts must be

made to accredit and certify such skills. To prepare women and girls for new employment opportunities, for example in the green economy, efforts are needed to encourage women and girls to pursue education and training in science and technology.

13. Other effective measures taken by countries to increase women's transition from education to decent work opportunities include: affirmative action and quotas in public sector employment; infrastructure improvements for increased use of ICT in rural areas; online resources and career counselling for job seekers; summer schools; internships; and mentoring programmes for women and girls. Training has also been provided to build women's business skills for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and to enhance their access to and use of ICT in business and entrepreneurship, notably e-commerce and e-marketing.

14. Steps have been taken to make education systems more flexible and responsive to the various needs of different groups of women and girls. Adult literacy centres, for example, have been established in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and religious groups to promote functional literacy among uneducated girls and women living in rural areas. Further targeted measures are needed to address the specific concerns of indigenous women, ethnic minorities, pregnant girls and teenage mothers, orphans and girls living in residential care, convicted women and women with disabilities. These groups would particularly benefit from access to ICT to support them in making informed choices in their areas of interest, needs and rights, thus leading to their economic empowerment.
