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Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

Agenda items 3 (a) (i) and 3 (c)

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:
priority theme: elimination and prevention of all forms of
violence against women and girls**

Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters

Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls: focus on prevention of violence against women and girls

Moderator’s summary

1. On 5 March 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel on the theme: “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls: focus on prevention of violence against women and girls”. The panel was part of the Commission’s consideration of the priority theme “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”.
2. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Ana Marie Hernando, moderated the discussion. The panellists were the President of the National Council of Women of Egypt, Mervat El-Tallawy; Adjunct Professor of the Faculty of Education and Counseling at Bosphorus University in Turkey, Pinar Ilkcaracan; the Head of the Department of Gender Equality at the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia, Liina Kanter; the Executive Director of Imkaan, a non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Marai Larasi; and the team leader on sexual health, gender, reproductive rights and adolescence in the

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Department of Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organization, Claudia Garcia Moreno Esteva.

3. Participants voiced concern that violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, rooted in structural gender inequality and discrimination. Violence against women and girls occurs in peacetime and conflict, in private and public spheres. Different speakers discussed a range of forms and manifestations of violence against women and girls, as well as new and emerging forms of violence, including those related to developments in technology, such as cyberbullying.

4. A holistic approach is required to address violence against women effectively. Such an approach should actively involve all segments of society and include legal and policy reforms and measures for prevention and protection of survivors, as well as data collection, analysis and research. Strong political will and sufficient resources are also necessary. To this end, several countries have placed gender-responsive budgeting at the core of their work to address and prevent violence against women, while others stressed the importance of regional and international cooperation.

5. Speakers noted that although progress has been made in the provision of support services to victims/survivors, more work needs to be done in the area of prevention. To date, the approach to prevention remains fragmented, mainly focusing on educational and awareness-raising initiatives and other isolated activities. Efforts to prevent violence against women and girls should address its root causes, including socioeconomic gender inequalities and the historical and patriarchal structures that control women's sexuality and reproductive rights. Such efforts should be carried out in a comprehensive and coordinated manner and be mutually reinforcing so as to have a sustained effect.

6. Effective prevention requires a comprehensive legal framework that protects the human rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights. National constitutions should guarantee gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, in line with the commitments that States have made through international conventions and instruments. Enshrining the principle of gender equality in interim constitutions of States in situations of political transition was seen as especially important. Concern was expressed that while women had often played a crucial part in important social movements, most recently during the Arab spring, they were marginalized or excluded from subsequent nation-building processes. It was stressed that women must participate meaningfully in the drafting of national constitutions and in various decision-making processes, including in conflict and post-conflict contexts, so as to ensure the full reflection of their rights.

7. Many countries have adopted or reformed legislation to help prevent violence against women and girls, in general, and/or its particular forms, for example domestic violence. Where such laws exist, the number of reported cases of violence has often increased. Additional measures such as protection orders for victims and disclosure of information on sexual offenders have contributed to preventing the reoccurrence of violence. Participants also referred to laws that address hate crimes against women and girls, for instance violence motivated by racism and hate speech, to enhance prevention.

8. National policies and action plans on ending violence against women and girls can provide an overarching framework for enhanced coordination of efforts among

different entities. Such policies and action plans should be comprehensive and multidisciplinary in scope and incorporate clear targets, indicators and timelines. They should also reflect the needs of particular groups that face an increased risk of violence. Civil society organizations and local communities should be involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation of such policies and action plans.

9. National policies and action plans must be implemented effectively to contribute to prevention of violence against women and girls. In this regard, participants stressed the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation, for strengthened coordination among the different actors and for the allocation of sufficient resources. Participants emphasized the importance of gender-sensitive budgeting in addressing gender in equality and violence against women and girls. Systematic capacity-building and training of public officials, in particular actors in the justice and health sectors, is also crucial.

10. Addressing women's economic inequality is of particular importance in preventing violence against women. To this end, many countries have initiatives in place that aim to foster the economic empowerment of women. The initiatives often include components of awareness-raising on gender equality and respect for human rights and engage the whole community, including men and boys. Participants also noted that further research is required to assess the impact of the current economic crisis on women and girls, particularly in relation to the level of violence against them.

11. Education has a central role in preventing violence against women and girls. Education can influence the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that condone violence against women and girls. Participants stressed that educational programmes should also include comprehensive education on sexuality in order to promote awareness of gender equality and enable women and girls to better protect themselves from violence, to strengthen the responsibility of men for their own sexual and reproductive behaviour, and to foster respectful relationships. Education is also a key tool for changing harmful stereotypes and thinking, for example as regards issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. To this end, several countries have adopted gender-sensitive curricula and have implemented anti-violence programmes and campaigns in their schools to ensure environments free of violence. It is also important to sensitize teachers about gender equality and respect for human rights and the prevention of violence against women and girls and build the skills of parents to develop respectful and violence-free relationships within families.

12. Awareness-raising on the causes and consequences of violence is an important component of a comprehensive prevention strategy. Such awareness-raising activities enhance awareness of the human rights of women and girls and of available remedies and services for survivors, and convey the unacceptability of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Speakers stressed the need for regular and sustained awareness-raising campaigns, extended to remote areas and tailored to reach particular population groups.

13. Participants stressed the importance of actively engaging men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls. Promising practices include programmes aimed at promoting positive constructs of masculinity, gender equality and equal sharing of responsibilities in different spheres. Participants also referred to studies showing that men with more gender-equal attitudes are less likely to perpetuate violence against women and girls.

14. Civil society has a notable role in the prevention of violence against women and girls. Speakers confirmed that civil society organizations have made great efforts in all aspects of preventing violence, from voicing the concerns of women and girls to undertaking awareness-raising activities and providing direct services. They are also crucial in mobilizing citizens at the local and community levels.

15. The media, including social media, play a particular role in either perpetuating or challenging social norms and behaviours that condone violence against women and girls. New developments in technology can be utilized positively to provide information to women and girls in remote and rural areas. Participants suggested that regulatory frameworks, which respect freedom of expression, should be in place to prevent gender discriminatory messages, enhance gender-sensitive reporting of violence and thus further contribute to protect women and girls from such violence. Participants shared good practices, such as popular television and radio programmes, including soap operas that promote gender equality and the human rights of women.

16. Evidence was shared about other promising initiatives in preventing violence against women and girls and includes programmes that target children who have experienced or witnessed violence, in order to avoid their further victimization or future perpetration of violence. Participants also suggested that corporal punishment of children should be banned around the world.
