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Commission on the Status of Women**Fifty-seventh session**

4-15 March 2013

Agenda items 3 (a) (i) and (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: the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls****Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters****Multisectoral services and responses for women and girls subject to violence****Moderator’s summary**

1. On 6 March 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel on the theme “Multisectoral services and responses for women and girls subject to violence”. This interactive panel was part of the Commission’s consideration of the priority theme of the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.
2. The discussion was moderated by Filippo Cinti, Vice-Chair of the Commission. The panellists were the following: Eva Giberti, Programme Coordinator of the Victims against Violence Programme of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, Argentina; Akima Thomas, Clinical Director of the Women and Girls Network, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Betty Timba, Divisional Coordinator, Community Services, for the Lusaka Division of the Zambia Police Service; and Luisa Marcal, Coordinator of “Fatin Hakmatek: the Safe Room Project”, Timor-Leste. The present summary synthesizes the key points discussed by panellists and participants.
3. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation and a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men



and of systemic gender-based discrimination. Despite increased global commitments to addressing the issue, violence against women and girls continues to persist in all countries and regions, with national statistics indicating prevalence rates of alarming proportions. Violence against women and girls has devastating consequences for survivors. It can result in serious injury and death. Violence has short- and long-term effects on the survivors' rights and health, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as significant mental health consequences, and can lead to a higher risk of subsequent revictimization. Violence against women and girls also hinders social and economic development and reduces productivity. It has enormous direct and indirect costs for countries in terms of the health sector, the police and criminal justice system, legal aid and related expenditures, as well as lost wages and productivity. Concrete measures to accelerate the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls are therefore critical and urgent.

4. Speakers confirmed that while the linkages between the prevention of and response to violence are strongly recognized as essential components of a holistic and comprehensive approach to ending violence against women and girls, and despite the improvements and promising practices reflected in responses for women and girls subject to violence, many challenges remain in ensuring the availability and accessibility of multisectoral services and coordinated responses for all women and girls subject to violence.

5. Women and girls who are survivors must have access to a full range of multisectoral services and responses that respond to both their immediate and their long-term needs. Participants highlighted the following: sensitive police and justice responses; safe emergency accommodation such as shelters; access to health services, including those for sexual and reproductive health; access to legal aid, psychosocial counselling and support; 24-hour emergency hotline services and long-term economic and employment assistance and social reintegration support; and services for children witnessing or experiencing violence. It is important that these services work together to reduce the burden and impact on women and girls in the process of reporting, response and recovery, to avoid the revictimization of survivors and to provide quality services.

6. While notable progress has been achieved in providing multisectoral support services to survivors, especially by expanding the availability of services and increasing the coordination and/or integration of governmental and non-governmental services and responses, the availability of services and responses remains limited; they are often available only in urban areas, and uneven in quality, scope and coverage. Evidence points to persisting obstacles preventing many women and girls, particularly those from ethnic and minority groups and those in rural and remote areas, from gaining access to multisectoral services and responses. Participants pointed out that funding and resources also continue to be a challenge, with recent austerity measures, owing to the economic and financial crisis, implemented in some countries, further increasing disparities in the provision and the quality of services.

7. Various models for providing integrated and coordinated services have been used in different countries. Good practices presented by participants include one-stop crisis centres and integrated service delivery models that include multiple stakeholders coordinated through referral mechanisms, as well as multidisciplinary

mobile outreach to individual women and girls. These can be tailored to address one form of violence, mainly domestic and/or sexual violence, or to respond to multiple forms of violence.

8. Some of these services have been established on a “rights- and survivor-based” approach and are based on the understanding that one size does not fit all. Interventions must also take account of women’s realities by providing services that respond to different manifestations and forms of violence and to the diverse needs of specific groups of women and girls, including women with disabilities, indigenous women, migrant women, women living with HIV and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

9. Participants confirmed that health systems and health-care services are often a key point of entry for survivors. Therefore, it is important that health services be an integral part of effective multisectoral responses. The provision of comprehensive, quality health care should encompass free medical treatment and care, including emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis and counselling support. Facility infrastructure should be upgraded to ensure privacy and adequate supplies, and protocols and guidelines should be strengthened and the capacity of health workers built with a view to identifying and responding appropriately to survivors of violence. While respecting the right of survivors to decide whether or not to report incidences of violence to police, health-care professionals play a key role in providing support, referring survivors to other specialized services, including the police, and collecting forensic evidence and documentation. A shared understanding and comprehensive referral mechanisms between police and health services to facilitate reporting procedures for survivors and minimize revictimization are examples of promising practices.

10. Gender-sensitive and effective police responses are a critical element of integrated service delivery models. While participants provided examples of improvement in the responses made by police to violence against women and girls that have resulted in increased confidence on the part of some women and girls in terms of reporting, they also pointed to many persisting challenges that result in a lack of protection and access to justice for survivors. Good practices followed in police responses include specialized police units, trained staff, increased recruiting of female police officers and increased accountability for the failure of police to respond appropriately.

11. The justice sector has a powerful role to play in a coordinated response to ending violence against women and girls. However, even when appropriate laws and policies exist, survivors often face challenges as a result of the inadequate response of the judicial system. Problematic judicial practices include displaying insensitivity, discrediting and doubting survivors’ experiences and focusing on treatment for perpetrators rather than the protection of victims. Furthermore, women often undergo judicial proceedings without adequate social, psychological and legal assistance and are at high risk of revictimization during those processes. These challenges are further compounded for women and girls who suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including those from indigenous communities, migrant women, women with disabilities and women living with HIV. Promoting the training of all personnel related to judicial processes, improving courtroom and legal proceedings so that they are gender-sensitive and survivor-centred, providing survivors with access to free or low-cost legal assistance and allowing survivors to be accompanied

by survivors' advocates or organizations to help them navigate the complex and often intimidating legal/judicial system are some of the most prominent promising practices.

12. Developing standards for the establishment of multisectoral services and responses and for the delivery of services, as well as building and expanding the capacity of all professionals working in this field is essential to ensure the necessary level of quality care and response. Efforts in this area, however, are generally fragmented, not institutionalized and heavily affected by high levels of staff turnover. There are a range of promising practices to strengthen capacities for service delivery that should be built upon and strengthened, including the joint training of service delivery professionals from different sectors as a means to increase collaboration and encourage a shared understanding, and the development of codes of practice, protocols, service guidelines and standard operating procedures.

13. An important component of coordinated multisectoral services and responses is the ability to assess their effectiveness through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. While monitoring should be undertaken by the relevant coordinating mechanism, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the system response should preferably be undertaken by an independent body as a means to ensure accountability. The regular collection of data on the causes and consequences of the prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls, for example, through national statistics offices, is also a good practice to inform the development and implementation of policies and programmes.

14. Communities have a role in responding to violence against women and girls. In this respect, the engagement and greater involvement of the community, including faith-based and traditional leaders, is considered a promising practice to enhance community responses. Similarly, while the role of men and boys in transforming gender inequality and harmful perceptions is widely acknowledged, some efforts are being focused on the development of perpetrator intervention programmes to change the behaviours of men who use violence, although the effectiveness of those programmes has yet to be rigorously evaluated.

15. The principles governing the development and delivery of effective services and responses for women and girls subject to violence have been well established. It is now understood that the response to violence against women and girls must be anchored in a human rights, survivor-focused framework and must be mandated in comprehensive legal and policy frameworks. They should be multisectoral and coordinated in order to respond to the multidimensional impacts of violence and to ensure that all women and their accompanying children, and girls have access to the necessary services and responses.

16. Gaps and challenges persist, however, and implementation has been slow and uneven across countries, resulting in insufficient and/or inappropriate availability and affordability of and access to services and support. The manner in which services and responses are established, the way in which professionals respond, the quality of services and the mechanisms in place to ensure safety, security and confidentiality for victims/survivors highlight the need to increase investments and to continue strengthening efforts, including through the development of standards as a means to ensure quality service provision.

17. Providing sustained support to and accompanying women and girls throughout the reporting and recovery process, as means of empowering survivors, are essential. Participants stressed that a holistic approach necessarily entails going beyond the provision of quality immediate and short-term support to the provision of long-term assistance, including employment assistance, access to long-term housing, social reintegration, reintegration into education for girls, and access to reparations that, in addition to providing restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and reintegration, are transformative in nature and address the root and structural causes of discrimination and inequality underlying violence against women and girls.
