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In-depth study on all forms of violence against women

INFORMATION NOTE

Background

On 22 December 2003, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution entitled "In-depth study on all forms of violence against women" (A/RES/58/185). The resolution requests the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women (the full text of the resolution is attached for easy reference).

The resolution spells out five areas to be addressed in the study:

- (i) A statistical overview on all forms of violence against women, in order to evaluate better the scale of such violence, while identifying gaps in data collection and formulating proposals for assessing the extent of the problem;
- (ii) The causes of violence against women, including its root causes and other contributing factors;
- (iii) The medium and long-term consequences of violence against women;
- (iv) The health, social and economic costs of violence against women;
- (v) The identification of best practice examples in areas including legislation, policies, programmes and effective remedies, and the efficiency of such mechanisms to the end of combating and eliminating violence against women.

The resolution clarifies that the study is to cover all forms of violence against women as identified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", and relevant documents, disaggregated by type of violence, and based on research undertaken and data collected at the national, regional and international levels. The study is to be conducted in close cooperation with all relevant bodies of the United Nations, as well as with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences of the Commission on Human Rights.

The Secretary-General is to solicit information, including on strategies, policies, programmes and best practices, from Member States as well as relevant non-governmental organizations.

The Secretary-General is further requested to make the study available to all Member States and observers, as well as to other United Nations stakeholders, and to submit a report, based on the study and with the study as an annex, to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session (2005), including action-oriented recommendations that also cover effective remedies and prevention and rehabilitation measures. A progress report was submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session (A/59/281).

The framework for the in-depth study

The issue of violence against women has become an important focus of action at national and international levels. Significant work has been undertaken by States, entities of the United Nations system, NGOs and researchers to document violence against women, and to develop responses to prevent violence from occurring, to prosecute and punish perpetrators, and to provide remedies and relief to victims.

The normative framework for the protection of women from violence includes a number of international human rights instruments and policy documents, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol; the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). The Statute of the International Criminal Court, based also on the experience and insights gained of the ICTY and ICTR, included various forms of sexual violence in the definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Intergovernmental bodies, including the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly, systematically pay attention to violence against women in its various facets, contributing to the normative framework as well as the implementation of practical actions. They adopt resolutions on violence against women, including those relating to specific forms of violence, trafficking in women, violence against women migrant workers, traditional practices affecting the health of women and girls, crimes committed in the name of honour, and domestic violence, and proposing strategies and actions to combat and eliminate different forms of violence against women. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice addresses issues of trafficking in human beings. The Sub-Commission on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights deals with issues including traditional practices affecting the health of women and girls; and systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices.

The Commission on Human Rights appointed, in 1994, a Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. During the nine years of her mandate, the first mandate holder covered the three areas where violence against women occurs, developed a model framework for domestic legislation, conducted missions to a number of countries, and made recommendations for action by States and other stakeholders across a broad spectrum of forms of violence against women. The current mandate holder, appointed in August 2003, has outlined her preliminary views on the future of the mandate indicating the aim to expand on the conceptualization of violence against women as defined in the Declaration and develop strategies for effective implementation (see E/CN.4/2004/66). At its sixtieth session, the Commission on Human Rights also created a new mandate of a Special Rapporteur on trafficking in human beings.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, through its general recommendation no.19 and its consideration of States parties' reports, continuously contributes to strengthened efforts to combat violence against women.

Areas to be covered by the in-depth study

The in-depth study will build on work that has been undertaken so far, synthesize and evaluate findings, and identify best practices and effective strategies, along with gaps and challenges. The study is intended to give a global picture of all forms of violence against women, the scale and prevalence of different forms of violence against women, its causes and consequences, as well as the costs of such violence. The study will identify gaps in knowledge and data collection, and give particular attention to good practice examples that highlight successful strategies to combat violence against women. Importantly, the study will include action-oriented recommendations that encompass effective remedies and prevention and rehabilitation measures.

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women identified three main areas where violence against women occurs, namely violence occurring in the family, the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State, clarifying that such violence can take physical, sexual and psychological forms. The study will be guided by these three broad areas, while also clarifying that not all forms of violence against women can be clearly subsumed under only one of these areas. While largely adhering to these three categories, the study will cover types of violence included in the Platform for Action and the outcome document, and other relevant documents. The study will also highlight the ways in which violence against women intersects, and impacts on, other aspects of women's enjoyment of their human rights and well-being.

A study on violence against children is currently being conducted by an independent expert, supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with significant attention to violence perpetrated against girl children and to gender perspectives.

Scope of the study

In relation to the areas identified, and as requested by the General Assembly, the study will provide, to the extent possible, a statistical overview in order to evaluate the scale of the various types of violence against women. Most importantly, the study will identify gaps in data collection, including methodological and definitional issues, and will propose ways for addressing such gaps. An effort will also be undertaken to identify trends in regard to various forms, types and scale of violence against women.

Such a quantitative assessment of violence against women will be complemented by an assessment of the causes of violence against women, as well as the consequences of such violence, primarily for women, but also for families and communities. In this regard, knowledge gaps will be identified, and priority areas for future research and intervention outlined. Past and ongoing efforts to calculate the economic costs of violence against women will be assessed, together with health and social costs, and recommendations submitted for further improvement of, and directions for such calculations.

Methodology for conducting the study

The Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for preparing the study. The study will build on work undertaken so far and draw on the expertise of a broad range of stakeholders in a collaborative manner, and seek the input of experts in the field. The Division will use different methodologies, as indicated below, for ensuring that the study gives a comprehensive survey of existing information and knowledge, a clear identification of gaps and challenges and areas for priority attention, as well as illustrative examples of good practices to encourage replication and adaptation.

In response to the mandate of the General Assembly resolution, the Division will seek inputs from Governments on good practices and lessons learned in areas of legislation, policy and strategy, to illustrate opportunities for tackling identified challenges, such as those reflected in responses to the questionnaire for the 10-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action. States parties' reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women will be important sources of information concerning good practice as well.

Entities of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations, will be encouraged to contribute to the study, and processes will be established to ensure that their work, including in the areas of research and analysis, funding, advocacy, awareness-raising and issue-specific efforts at national, regional and international level can be reflected in the study.

The Division will convene up to three meetings of experts (academics and practitioners) on particular topics or issues. These meetings will review the state of the art of the selected topic in regard to current research, legislation, policy and practice, and assess progress, challenges and responses. They will also put forward recommendations for further action. It is proposed that the expert meetings focus in particular on (a) the question of available statistics, data collection and methodological concerns; and (b) good practices on combating violence against women.

On issues within the scope of the study but not covered by expert meetings, the Division will seek to commission briefing papers to synthesize the existing state of knowledge and practice. Literature reviews may also be commissioned to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and gains in tackling violence against women in all parts of the world, whereby it will be especially important to ensure that work from all regions is successfully channeled into the study.

The Division will conduct online discussions to ensure that all interested stakeholders have opportunity to provide input.

Channels for cooperation, and information dissemination

Task force: A consultative mechanism – a task force – will be convened in order to ensure that the study will synthesize, and build on the knowledge and practical experience of all relevant United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations. The task force will ensure that these stakeholders contribute effectively to the preparation of the study, and provide input from their particular area of expertise. The task force will also be invited to suggest experts and practitioners in any of the topics that will be the subject of an expert meeting, or a briefing paper. Meetings of the task force will take place in New York, and will be complemented by electronic information sharing and networking.

Webpage: A page dedicated to the study will be created on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women to ensure ongoing information dissemination and to facilitate and encourage the input and involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in the study.

Advisory Committee: An Advisory Committee consisting of a small number (8 - 10) of high-level internationally recognized experts in the field will be constituted to provide guidance and advice to the Division at critical junctures of the preparatory process of the study. It is expected that the Advisory Committee would include among its members the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Advisory Committee will provide its advice primarily via electronic means.

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