

**2008 ECOSOC coordination segment – Round table discussion (III)**

*“The role of the Economic and Social Council in addressing violence against women in all its forms and manifestations:*

*A dialogue with the chairpersons of the functional commissions”*

**Tuesday, 8 July, 4-6 pm**

**Statement by H.E. MS. Kirsti Lintonen  
Chairperson  
Commission for Social Development**

Delivered by Ms. Lorena Gimenez  
Vice-Chair  
Commission for Social Development

Your Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to participate in this round table dialogue on a very importance issue. I regret not being able to be with you in person. I thank the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination for organizing this round table. I would like to assure you of the full support of the Commission for Social Development as well as my personal commitment to strengthening the role of ECOSOC and its functional commissions, including in addressing violence against women in all its forms and manifestations.

I shall take this opportunity to present to you the work of the Commission for Social Development in this regard.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/143 of 30 January 2007, which invited ECOSOC and its functional commissions to discuss, by 2008, within their respective mandates, the question of violence against women in all its forms and manifestations, the Commission for Social Development considered the issue under its priority theme “promoting full employment and decent work” at its 46<sup>th</sup> session in February 2008. An expert from the International Labour Organization was invited to make a presentation followed by an interactive discussion with Members of the Commission. A summary of the discussion was transmitted to the Secretary-General in the form of a letter from the Chairperson of the Commission.

The discussion focused on three major issues related to violence against women in the work environment: the inter-linkages between decent work and gender-based discrimination; a review of recent developments in women’s participation in labour

markets; and the most effective policy interventions and proposals of integrated set of immediate and long-term gender-sensitive policies in order to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Gender-based discrimination in labour markets limits the range of opportunities and choices for women, their possibilities for advancement and opportunities by reducing their incomes and by increasing inequalities in labour market outcomes between men and women. These deficits tend to perpetuate violence against women at work, in the community and in the family. Violence against women at work can best be addressed with gender-sensitive labour-market policies. Such policies should be accompanied also by general violence against women policies in society, so as to change attitudes and behaviours that discriminate and violate women in society at large. Moreover, addressing such inequalities and discrimination can make a critical contribution towards eliminating all forms of violence against women through their economic empowerment.

Gender-based discrimination at work has a significant social and economic cost for society. In addition to the emotional and psychological suffering it causes, it results in a waste of human talents and a loss in labour productivity. Therefore, continued employment inequalities could significantly hamper the advances achieved through economic growth and impede efforts aimed at eradicating poverty and empowering women.

In the last ten years, there have been several positive developments in women's participation in the labour markets. Gender gaps in education are narrowing everywhere and women, more than men, enroll in tertiary education in most regions of the world. In most regions, women's entry into the labour force continues to increase. Although the ratio of women in high profile-jobs has increased, women still remain a minority among workers at the highest levels, including in the United Nations.

Despite these positive developments, numerous challenges remain. A large number of women are still working without pay. The challenge women often are faced with, in comparison to men, is that they must balance labour-market work with domestic work. Thus, the workload is much greater for women than men, as a result of the additional hours spent for unpaid work. Also, women are over-represented in the service and informal sector, which includes part-time and temporary positions. And for the most part, women continue to under earn the average male, even for the same type of work or work of equal value.

To sum up, different types of gender-based discrimination still persist in the work environment: occupational segregation, particularly due to pregnancy and motherhood; discrimination in remuneration and advancement; unequal division of paid and unpaid work between men and women; and sexual harassment. All these types of discriminations are interrelated, mutually reinforcing and underpin gender inequality at work, which, in turn, underscores various forms of violence against women and gender inequality in society at large.

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In our discussion, concerns were expressed over the continuing existence and implications of gender-based inequalities; the consequences of shifts in power within families when women achieve greater economic freedom; difficulties proving sexual harassment in the workplace; and the treatment of migrant workers, especially domestic workers.

A combination of gender-sensitive labour-market policies and measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and removing barriers to women's full and equal participation in productive employment and decent work are required to ultimately achieve gender equality and empowering women. Among them, measures to improve and monitor trends in women's labour market are needed. Coherent and effective laws and enforcement mechanisms are fundamental to curb violence against women, including incentives or promotional mechanisms. A coherent set of public policies that act simultaneously on the different types of discrimination should also be designed. Although the sequencing and mix of these policy measures can vary depending on national circumstances, political leadership, committed and well-equipped employers' and workers' organizations are recognized as essential.

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Colleagues,

I would like to share with you some reflections on the approach the Commission for Social Development took to address the issue of violence against women during this year's session as my concluding remarks, in the hope to help us identify priorities for addressing this issue within the mandates of ECOSOC and its functional commissions. Members of the Commission felt the discussion was fruitful and made a constructive contribution, although some members expressed initial reservations as to the relevance of the topic to the priority theme of the Session. The success was largely due to the effort of the Commission in identifying gender-based discrimination and inequality in the work place as root causes of violence against women in all forms, under the priority theme of promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all. This enabled the Commission to add value to the discussion of violence against women within the framework of its work, and avoided duplicating the work of other UN bodies, notably the Commission on the Status of Women. I believe we all can draw a useful lesson from the experience of the Commission for Social Development.

Thank you.

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