

2003/44

Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

The Economic and Social Council,

Endorses the following agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-seventh session with respect to participation in and access of women to the media and on information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women:

1. The Commission on the Status of Women recalls and reiterates the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action⁷² and the outcome document adopted at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century”,⁷³ on the potential of the media and of information and communications technologies to contribute to the advancement and empowerment of women. It also recalls the United Nations Millennium Declaration⁷⁴ and its Development Goals to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease, to stimulate development that is truly sustainable and to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies, are available to all.

⁷² *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

⁷³ General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex.

⁷⁴ General Assembly resolution 55/2.

2. The Commission notes that, globally, there are substantial differences in participation in, access to and use of media and information and communications technologies, their content and production. Such differences have important implications for policy development at national, regional and international levels. A focus on the gender dimensions of information and communications technologies is essential in order to prevent and combat any adverse impact of the digital revolution on gender equality and the perpetuation of existing inequalities and discrimination, including the sexual exploitation of women both through the traditional media and new technologies. The media and information and communication technologies also offer tools for enhancing women's full access to the benefits of information and new technologies and can become central tools for women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. Efforts are therefore necessary to increase women's access to and participation in the media and information and communication technologies, including in their decision-making processes and new opportunities created through information and communication technologies.

3. The Commission welcomes the convening of the World Summit on the Information Society, which is to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, and urges all participants to take the following recommendations into account and to integrate gender perspectives in every facet of the Summit. It further encourages the participation of women in the Summit, to include significant numbers of gender equality experts and women experts in the field of information and communication technology as members of national delegations, organizations of civil society and the business community.

4. The Commission urges Governments and, as appropriate, the relevant funds and programmes, organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, the international financial institutions, civil society, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, to take the following actions:

- (a) Prioritize the integration of gender perspectives and ensure women's early and full participation in the development and implementation of national policies, legislation, programmes, projects, strategies and regulatory and technical instruments in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) and media and communications, and create monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation of gender-sensitive policies and regulations as well as to analyse the gender impact of such policies in consultation and collaboration with

women information technology specialists, women's organizations and gender equality advocates;

- (b) Encourage regulatory bodies, where they exist, to promote full participation of women in the ownership, control and management in the ICT and media sectors;
- (c) Include gender perspectives and measurable gender-specific targets in all programmes and projects on ICT for development, as well as specific activities, as appropriate, for women and girls as active users of information;
- (d) Remove ICT-related infrastructural barriers that disproportionately affect women and girls and promote the establishment of affordable and accessible ICT-related infrastructure for all women and girls, bearing in mind the specific needs and interests of women and girls living in countries in the process of peace-building and reconstruction;
- (e) Invite, as appropriate, through partnerships, or through the use of self-regulatory gender-sensitive guidelines and self-regulatory gender-sensitive guidelines for media coverage and representation, public and community media to work in support of gender equality, bearing in mind the importance of providing financial resources and other support;
- (f) Support research into all aspects of the impact of the media and ICT on women and girls, in particular into their information needs and interests, review existing media and ICT policies and find ways to adapt ICT to the needs of poor and, in particular, illiterate women, in order to overcome barriers and support women's empowerment;
- (g) Make education, formal and non-formal, a priority in particular for the development of ICT and take measures to promote girls' education so as to enable girls and women to gain access to ICT;
- (h) Include, at appropriate levels of government, ICT education for girls and women in curricula at all educational levels, from early childhood to tertiary level, as well as in continuing education, in order to promote and ensure women's full participation in the information society;
- (i) Take concrete steps to increase the number of female students at all educational levels in media- and ICT-related subjects, including science,

mathematics and technology, including through such methods as distance- and e-learning;

- (j) Establish or, where they already exist, expand skills training, vocational and employment training and capacity-building programmes for women and girls and women's non-governmental organizations on the use, design and production of ICT, including preparing them to take on leadership roles and promote their participation in the political process, and integrate a gender perspective in ICT training programmes for teachers and in training programmes for media professionals;
- (k) Enable equal access for women to ICT-based economic activities, such as small business and home-based employment, to information systems and improved technologies and to new employment opportunities in this area, and consider developing tele-centres, information centres, community access points and business incubators;
- (l) Strengthen partnerships among all stakeholders to build the capacity of women to fully participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, the information society, including e-governance, where it exists and as it is developed, and participatory approaches;
- (m) Ensure equal opportunities for women and monitor gender representation in different categories and levels of work, education and training in the media and ICT areas, with a view to increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels of ICT and the media;
- (n) Provide management, negotiation and leadership training for women, as well as mentoring systems and other support strategies and programmes to enhance women's capabilities and potential for advancement in the media and ICT sectors;
- (o) Take effective measures, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, to combat the growing sexualization and use of pornography in media content, in terms of the rapid development of ICT, encourage the media to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects and commodities, combat ICT- and media-based violence against women, including criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and girls, and support the development and use of ICT as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including those affected by violence, abuse and other forms of sexual exploitation;

- (p) Respect the value of different and local languages and promote and encourage local knowledge systems and locally produced content in media and communications, support the development of a wide range of ICT-based programmes in local languages, as appropriate, with content relevant to different groups of women, and build the capacity of girls and women to develop ICT content;
- (q) Encourage South-South cooperation to facilitate transfer and exchange of low-cost technologies and appropriate ICT content between developing countries for the benefit of women and girls;
- (r) Strengthen and encourage the use of existing information and communication technologies, such as radio, television, telecommunications and print, in parallel in order to enhance the use of new technologies for gender equality and the economic, political and social empowerment of women as leaders, participants and consumers and recognize that women and girls are potentially large-scale consumers, users and producers of ICT and media;
- (s) Collect, share, positively recognize and widely publicize good practices to counter gender stereotyping, negative portrayals and exploitation of women in all forms of the media and ICT as part of their efforts to eliminate discrimination and violence against women;
- (t) Increase efforts to compile, and disaggregate by sex and age, statistics on ICT use, in order to develop gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs and to collect gender-specific data on employment and education patterns in the media and in ICT professions;
- (u) Provide adequate and appropriate resources for innovative, affordable, accessible and sustainable media and ICT programmes, projects and products that support gender equality and gender mainstreaming, are relevant to the concerns of women and girls and provide support to women's online communities and networks that promote gender equality;
- (v) Prioritize the allocation of resources to support programmes, projects and strategies that aim at increasing women's participation in, and equal access to, the information society, including vocational, scientific and technical training, literacy training and capacity-building programmes;
- (w) Enhance, for the benefit of women and girls, international cooperation in support of national efforts to create an enabling environment to re-

duce the digital and information divide between developed and developing countries and promote, develop and enhance access to ICT, including the Internet infrastructure by facilitating access to, and transfer of, knowledge and technology on concessional, preferential and favourable terms to the developing countries, as mutually agreed, taking into account the need to protect intellectual property rights and the special needs of developing countries;

- (x) Strengthen the capacity of national machineries for the advancement of women, including through the allocation of adequate and appropriate resources and the provision of technical expertise, to take a lead advocacy role with respect to media and ICT and gender equality, support their involvement in national, regional and international processes related to media and ICT issues and enhance coordination among ministries responsible for ICT, national machineries for the advancement of women, the private sector and national non-governmental organizations working in the field of gender advocacy.